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In this dissertation, I expand our understanding of the dramatic audience, approaching this complicated concept through the playwright's representations of the audience on and from the stage, what I have entitled "imagined audiences." While recent literary criticism approaches the Renaissance audience primarily from a demographic perspective, I use the term "imagined audiences" to focus on the fictional audiences the writer produces on the stage. Since Renaissance dramas are filled with references to theatergoers (and theatergoing), observers, auditors, and watchers, the playwright's representations of audience, his "imagined audiences," take on many forms. For example, the playgoers represented in and through the Early Modern prologues along with the fictional auditors such as Theseus and his fellow Athenian spectators, who watch the play-within-a-play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, serve as "imagined audiences." Furthermore, since actors represent the initial auditors for the play and its performance, depictions of actors on the stage, as seen in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*, are also included in the definition of "imagined" or staged audiences. Including these representations in our understanding of "audience" allows us to approach Renaissance dramas and their audiences from a fuller perspective. Using both literary and composition theorists, I argue that this broader view highlights how playwrights visualized composition as a collaborative process in which the playwright and the audience work together to compose the text and its meaning. Also, through their

imagined audiences, playwrights invoked their ideal and distinct view of this collaborative relationship that helps shape the playwright's identity.

“ASKED TO BEAR THEIR PART”: REDEFINING THE AUDIENCE
IN EARLY MODERN DRAMA

by

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Approved by

Committee Chair

To my husband for his love, humor, and support.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of
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INTRODUCTION

Recent literary criticism approaches the Renaissance audience primarily from a demographic perspective, following Alfred Harbage and Andrew Gurr's research on theatergoers. Harbage writes, "We cannot be right about the soul of Shakespeare's audience if we are wrong about its body, that the number, kind, conduct, and visible response of the spectators are relevant factors, that we need a scaffolding of fact for the building of conjecture" (*Shakespeare's Audience* 4). In other words, they focus on the physical composition of Shakespeare's contemporary audiences in order to learn more about the stage, play, and playwright. While I agree that demographics are important—they help identify the social and economic factors of London and its citizens—this type of research does not address the many representations and effects of the audience found in Early Modern dramas. Audiences portrayed in a play-within-a-play as well as the broader concept of actors as audience members are often excluded from consideration. Furthermore, demographic studies are based on historical data, confining discussions of the audience to the contemporary Globe theatergoers and omitting the modern audience's interaction with the drama. Currently, the lens through which we view the audience is simply too narrow.

In this dissertation, I expand our understanding of the dramatic audience, approaching this complicated concept through the playwright's representations of the audience on and from the stage, what I have entitled "imagined" or staged audiences. I

use the term “imagined audiences” to differentiate the actual playgoers, those who paid admission to the Globe, for example, from the fictional audiences the writer produces on the stage. Since Renaissance dramas are filled with references to theatergoers (and theatergoing), observers, auditors, and watchers, the playwright’s representations of audience, his “imagined audiences,” take on many forms.¹ For example, the playgoers represented in and through the Early Modern prologues along with the fictional auditors such as Theseus and his fellow Athenian spectators, who watch the play-within-a-play in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, serve as “imagined audiences.” Furthermore, since actors represent the initial auditors for the play and its performance, depictions of actors on the stage, as seen in Ben Jonson’s *The Alchemist*, are also included in the definition of “imagined” or staged audiences. In addition, as we shall see throughout this dissertation and particularly in *The Alchemist*, often playwrights used one or more of these “imagined audiences” within a single text or performance. Including these representations in our understanding of “audience” allows us to approach Renaissance dramas and their audiences from a fuller perspective. As I argue, this broader view highlights how playwrights visualized composition as a collaborative process in which the playwright and the audience work together to compose the text and its meaning. Also, through their imagined audiences, playwrights invoked their ideal and distinct view of this collaborative relationship that helps shape the playwright’s identity.

To support my claims, I approach my primary sources—Early Modern prologues, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *The Alchemist*, and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*—as performance and dramatic texts. In addition, I draw from both literary and composition

theorists, who help identify the terms “collaboration,” “playwright,” and “audience.”

Although I understand the differences between a performance text, text in performance, and a dramatic text, text written for the stage, believe that many performance elements are embedded in Early Modern dramatic texts. These dramas include references to specific stage directions and types of acting. Therefore, while I examine written dramatic texts, the texts we ultimately use in the classroom and in literary criticism, I include discussions on my primary texts’ performance elements.

My principal literary theorist, Stephen Greenblatt, introduces the common critical view of Renaissance writers and their audience in order to dispel this myth and begins our discussion of the audience and of collaboration:

In literary criticism Renaissance artists function like Renaissance monarchs: at some level we know perfectly well that the power of the prince is largely a collective invention, the symbolic embodiment of the desire, pleasure, and violence of thousands of subjects, the instrumental expression of complex networks of dependency of fear, the agent rather than the maker of the social will. Yet we can scarcely write of prince or poet without accepting the fiction that power directly emanates from him and that society draws upon this power. (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 4)

According to Greenblatt, while the relationship between the writer and the audience resembles the union between a monarch and his subjects, this connection entails a “collective” relationship rather than an absolute monarchy. Instead of the writer’s power “directly emanat[ing] from him” and “society draw[ing] upon this power,” the artist’s power and authority derives from the “symbolic embodiment of the desire, pleasure, and violence of thousands of subjects” (4). In other words, the writer’s power comes from his

relationship with his audience, and, in turn, the artist's audience helps supply and create the playwright's power. From this perspective, the playwright and the audience are part of a *collaborative* venture (though Greenblatt does not use this particular term), where the artist (playwright) and his subjects (the audience) work together in order for society or, in this case, the theater to operate. Here the playwright is a cooperative worker participating in a social union with the audience.

Greenblatt's redefinition of the Renaissance artist calls into question not only how we envision the writer, but also how we discuss the audience and collaboration. Often, as Greenblatt points out, we examine the audience as an entity that is acted upon by the "absolute monarch"; however, Greenblatt inherently identifies the audience as a dynamic participant in the "social will." In addition, Greenblatt portrays the audience and the writer working in a collaborative union. In comparison, traditionally, literary theorists have approached "collaboration" as "co-authorship," two or more authors writing a single text. In her article, "Early Modern Collaboration and Theories of Authorship," Heather Hirschfeld discusses this approach to collaboration as "largely the domain of the New Bibliographers, who focused, beginning in the early part of the twentieth century, on deciphering who penned what lines or who set what copy." These scholars "depend not only on a notion of authorship and literary activity as a solitary and autonomous endeavor but also on a commitment to, or a faith in the value of, the procedure of dividing, labeling, and identifying contributors as a good in and of itself" (610).² While this is one way to define collaboration, two writers working together to produce a single text, Greenblatt along with numerous composition theorists, particularly Louise Rosenblatt

and Karen LeFevre, suggest that a collaborative union also exists between the writer and his audience.³ Early Modern playwrights address their audience from this perspective and explore how this relationship operates.

In her *Literature as Exploration*, Louise Rosenblatt argues that the reader's response to a text creates meaning: "A novel or poem or play remains merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols" (24). The reader or audience actively participates with the text. While Rosenblatt focuses on the reader (audience), she, like Greenblatt, portrays the audience and the writer as participants in a relationship that brings the text to life. Rosenblatt asserts that a "live," two-way relationship exists between the text and the reader. "The literary work," Rosenblatt explains, "exists in the live circuit set up between reader and text: the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meanings into the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel thoughts and feelings" (24). She also emphasizes this connection in a later passage:

In the past, reading has too often been thought of as an interaction, the printed page impressing its meaning on the reader's mind or the reader extracting the meaning embedded in the text. Actually, reading is a constructive, selective process over time in a particular context. The relations between the reader and the signs on the page proceed in a to-and-fro spiral, in which each is continually being affected by what the other has contributed. (26)

According to Rosenblatt, the reader interprets the writer's initial symbols while also carrying their own thoughts to the work, creating a relationship through which the writer and the reader work together to bring meaning to the text. Within this "live circuit," the

audience embeds their feelings, thoughts, and desires into the text, and these elements intermingle with what is already in the work, ultimately becoming a part of the text's meaning. Furthermore, Rosenblatt's discussion reinforces a social relationship between the writer and the audience. The writer and the reader learn the "symbols" and "emotions" from their social setting, and, for Rosenblatt, literature connects all human beings, both writer and reader, reader and reader, writer and writer: "Is not the substance of literature everything that human beings have thought or felt or created" (5). The writer, audience, and text are all connected through the human experience, and both the writer and the audience participate in this social union.

Similar to Rosenblatt's discussions of the audience and the writer/audience relationship, Karen LeFevre also reinforces the collaborative union between the writer and the audience. Her *Invention as a Social Act* examines the rhetoric of invention, the way in which a writer exists in society and the way "something" is formed: "This study argues that rhetorical invention is better understood as a social act, in which an individual who is at the same time a social being interacts in a distinctive way with society and culture to create something" (1). LeFevre's discussion closely parallels Greenblatt's comparison of the poet and the audience to the interaction between a monarch and his subjects. Using "George Herbert Mead, Martin Buber, Clifford Geertz, and Wayne Booth," LeFevre asserts that "the inventing 'self' is socially influenced, even socially constituted" (33). In other words, the "'self'" is part of society and society influences the "'self.'" In addition, society helps construct the "'self.'" If we translate this into terms of writer and audience, the audience (a part of society) affects the writer and his work and

aids in the invention of the writer's identity. Furthermore, according to LeFevre, the writer communicates through socially constructed elements: "One invents with language or with other symbol systems, which are socially created and shared by members of discourse communities," and "invention builds on a foundation of knowledge accumulated from previous generations" (34). These socially devised languages supply the method through which the writer communicates. In addition, LeFevre asserts, referencing Ede and Lunsford (theorists we will further explore) that "invention may be enabled by an internal dialogue with an imagined other or a construct of audience that supplies the premises or structures of belief guiding the inventor" (34). The writer learns this "internal dialogue" through social activities and relationships, "social interactions" (34). LeFevre's theory of invention places the writer within a social context and reinforces the relationship between the writer and his audience. The socially influenced and constructed writer invents through not only social structures of language, but also through "an imagined other or a construct of audience" (34). Furthermore, LeFevre is careful to reiterate that "invention is a dialectical process in that the inventing individual(s) and the socioculture are co-existing and mutually defining" (35). The writer helps define the audience, and the audience helps define the writer. In other words, in addition to society influencing the writer or inventor, the writer also influences society. The relationship here between writer and society, writer and audience, requires collaboration, both parties working together for what Greenblatt would call "the social will" (4).

Following the assertions of Greenblatt, Rosenblatt, and LeFevre, I argue that Early Modern playwrights approached their relationship with the audience as a collaborative union, where both parties work together to bring the play to fruition and to create the text's meaning. As this dissertation proves, staged or imagined audiences—fictional auditors, on-stage depictions of actors, and the audience represented in the prologues—highlight this relationship. However, while each playwright I examine (William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Francis Beaumont) envisions composition as collaborative, this relationship takes on many forms. Early Modern playwrights were exploring and establishing how the collaborative relationship between the playwright and the audience could operate and investigating the issues of authority inherent in such a union. Therefore, playwrights also use their representations of audience to describe their ideal collaborative relationship and to conjure their model participants. Furthermore, Shakespeare, Jonson, and Beaumont's various approaches to collaboration not only examine issues of authority, but also help establish their identities. Though the concept of "author" occurred in the Romantic period, the Renaissance artist, as Greenblatt argues in his *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, was attempting to create his identity: "Perhaps the simplest observation we can make is that in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process" (2). And literature served as the nexus for this invention of self: "Literature functions within this system in three interlocking ways: as a manifestation of the concrete behavior of its particular author, as itself the expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped, and as a reflection upon those codes" (4). I argue that one of

the ways in which Renaissance artists established their identity is in their representations of audience. We recognize the playwright through the way in which he approaches his audience and envisions his collaborative relationship. As LeFevre contends, the audience helps establish the writer's identity and the writer helps establish the audience's identity (33). In other words, through their imagined audiences, playwrights endeavored to address their collaborative position while also invoking their ideal original and future audiences, and this relationship helps the playwright create his identity and examine issues of authority.

To solidify this claim, I turn to composition theorists Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford. As Ede and Lunsford explain, writers, through the act of composing, not only take into consideration the audiences of their rhetorical situation, in this case the theater, but also use the language of the text to invoke a like-minded audience, an audience that shares in the playwright's view of collaboration. In their article "Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy," Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, attempt to answer recent critical composition questions about the audience—"How can we best define the audience of a written discourse? What does it mean to address an audience? To what degree should teachers stress audience in their assignments and discussions?" (155). In response to these issues, Ede and Lunsford examine the two primary view points of audience, which they have entitled "audience addressed" and "audience invoked," in order "to expand our understanding of the role audience plays in composition theory and pedagogy by demonstrating that the arguments advocated by each side of the current debate

oversimplify the act of making meaning through written discourse” (155-156). They then offer a fuller understanding of audience that incorporates both terms, advocating that “audience addressed” and “audience invoked” are not “necessarily dichotomous or contradictory” (165); audience is both “addressed” and “invoked.”

According to Ede and Lunsford, the term “audience addressed” exemplifies “the concrete reality of the writer’s audience,” and those who portray their audience as addressed “also share the assumption that knowledge of this audience’s attitudes, beliefs, and expectations is not only possible (via observation and analysis) but essential” (156). The drawback of this particular view, as Ede and Lunsford explain, is that it places too much emphasis on the authority of the audience and the role the concrete audience performs in the composition process. Furthermore, Ede and Lunsford examine Ruth Mitchell’s and Mary Taylor’s view of audience, a representative look at the perspective of “audience addressed,” and declare that this depiction of audience ignores the writer’s “internal dialogue, through which writers analyze inventional problems and conceptualize patterns of discourse.” Furthermore, “audience addressed” does not recognize that “writers must rely in large part upon their own vision of the reader, which they create, as readers do their vision of writers, according to their own experiences and expectations” (158). In addition to overemphasizing the role of the audience, “audience addressed” neglects the significance of the writer.

In comparison, “audience invoked” places the authority in the hands of the writer, denoting the audience as the writer’s creation: “Those who envision audience as invoked stress that the audience of a written discourse is a construction of the writer.”

Furthermore, “The writer uses the semantic and syntactic resources of language to provide cues for the reader—cues which help to define the role or roles the writer wishes the reader to adopt in responding to the text” (160). Through an examination of Walter Ong’s discussion of the audience in his “The Writer’s Audience is Always a Fiction,” Ede and Lunsford declare that this second approach to audience also has its flaws. In opposition to “audience addressed,” “audience invoked” gives too much authority to the writer and does not adequately incorporate the possible “constraints” the audience could put on the writer (162): audience invoked “distorts the processes of writing and reading by overemphasizing the power of the writer and undervaluing that of the reader” (165). “Audience invoked” simply gives the writer too much authority and disregards the writer’s immediate rhetorical situation.

After explaining the concepts of “audience addressed” and “audience invoked” as well as the flaws in each perspective, Ede and Lunsford declare that these two views are not dichotomous and that audience is actually a mixture of both “audience addressed” and “audience invoked”:

The addressed audience, the actual or intended readers of a discourse, exists outside of the text. Writers may analyze these readers’ needs, anticipate their biases, even defer to their wishes. But it is only through the text, through language, that writers embody or give life to their conception of the reader. In so doing, they do not so much create a role for the reader—a phrase which implies that the writer somehow creates a mold to which the reader adapts—as invoke it. Rather than relying on incantations, however, writers conjure their vision—a vision which they hope readers will actively come to share as they read the text—by using all the resources of language available to them to establish a broad, and ideally coherent, range of cues for the reader. (167)

While a concrete audience, an “audience addressed,” exists outside of the text and while writers often do “anticipate” the characteristics and needs of this audience, another piece of the puzzle exists. Through the text and its language, the writer works to “invoke” his vision of audience. The combination of the external “audience addressed” and the internal “audience invoked” more fully describes the concept of audience.

Even though Ede and Lunsford primarily focus their attention on the audience in written texts, their discussion is also applicable to spoken discourse—“We do not wish here to collapse all distinctions between oral and written communication, but rather to emphasize that speaking and writing are, after all, both rhetorical acts” (162). Thus, Ede and Lunsford’s discussion of audience applies to Renaissance dramas which incorporate both spoken and written discourse. Ede and Lunsford’s theory helps us to understand how these writers view the audience; the audience is both addressed and invoked. As we shall see throughout this dissertation, Early Modern playwrights address the audience of their rhetorical situation, the Renaissance theater, as collaborators. Furthermore, playwrights attempt to summon their model audience, an audience that “will actively come to share” in the playwright’s perception of collaboration (12). Imagined audiences not only depict a collaborative union between the Renaissance artist and his playgoers, but also serve as a rhetorical device, “a cue,” through which the playwright invokes his model participatory audience (167).

I support my claims in four chapters. The first chapter, “For ‘tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings’: The Writer/Audience Dynamic on the Early Modern Stage,” focuses on how various playwrights represent their audiences in and through the

Early Modern prologues. These imagined audiences approach the theatergoers as collaborators, as part of the performance. I begin here with an examination of the prologue's form and function. The Early Modern prologues evolved from Greek dramas, yet these opening speeches found a new position and purpose in the Renaissance, often functioning similarly to the audience they depict. The prologues and the audience are both insiders and outsiders to the production. Though they operate outside of the fourth wall, they are still participants in the performance and co-creators of the production. In addition, numerous prologues and playwrights address this collaborative relationship while summoning their view of a collaborative audience. Through close-readings of prologues to plays such as *The Roaring Girl*, *Henry V*, and *The Four Prentices of London*, I examine how Early Modern playwrights ultimately use the prologues' form and function to conjure the playwright's desired collaborator.

The second chapter changes our focus from several primary sources to a single drama, William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In this section, I explore Shakespeare's view of the playwright/audience relationship throughout the play and particularly his use of the fictional auditors in Act Five. Through Hermia, Shakespeare envisions an audience that is not easily manipulated, and through the Rude Mechanicals, Shakespeare critiques playwrights who give too much or not enough authority to the audience. Furthermore, Theseus and his guests represent an imagined audience that, once again, highlights the collaborative qualities of the stage while also invoking Shakespeare's ideal audience. In addition, Shakespeare establishes his identity and authority by not only conjuring his model audience but also by envisioning that audience

as dynamic and equal partners in the production, an audience that shares in bringing the play's comedic intent to fruition and helps "amend" the play. This invocation also promotes Shakespeare's uniqueness. He establishes his identity without drawing attention to himself as a writer or to his position in the playwright/audience relationship. He is a silent participant.

As I examine Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*, I focus on another representation of the audience: actors. *The Alchemist* also approaches the union between the playwright and the audience as a collaborative relationship, but Jonson uses multiple layers of collaboration to depict Doll, Face, and Subtle (con men) and their customers as co-creators of the performance. Furthermore, Jonson uses his imagined audience to describe his view of the collaborative relationship, invoking his ideal spectators. However, Jonson's conjured audience differs from those in both *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* in that Jonson summons an ideal audience that is an unwitting participant in Jonson's overall moral scheme. The "venture tripartite's" customers are gullible, unaware that Face, Doll, and Subtle cannot turn metal into gold or create omniscient spirits. Face and his company easily con money away from Dapper, Druggier, and Mammon. In addition, in the final act, the "tripartite," who previously served as the manipulators, must now obey the owner of the house, Lovewit. While Jonson fully envisions a collaborative relationship between the playwright and the audience—his gullible customers and greedy con men co-create the performance—Jonson's ideal audience collaborates to create the play's plot but has little control over the play's "moral" outcome and teachings. Jonson's play demonstrates that a collaborative

relationship exists between the playwright and the audience, each helps bring the play to fruition; however, Jonson questions how this dynamic operates. Is collaboration an equal partnership or does the authority in this union lie with either the playwright or the audience? For Jonson, the playwright creates the collaborative dynamic and consciously maneuvers the authority in his favor. Jonson couples his invocation of his model collaborators with several blatant self-authorizing moments to declare his identity as a writer. Jonson makes a bid for his own authority through Lovewit and throughout the play, an action that does not appear in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. While this does not negate the collaborative relationship between the playwright and the audience, it does bring to the surface issues of authority.

The final chapter turns to Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and its imagined audience. Similar to both Shakespeare and Jonson, Beaumont approaches his audience as collaborators, but Beaumont, at first glance, also presents the audience (both the theatergoers and the citizens) as dominate participants, bringing issues of authority again to the forefront. However, as I argue throughout this chapter, he ultimately uses this façade and his realistic view of the middle class to question their expectations and authority. For Beaumont, the audience and the playwright work together as partners not only to create the performance but also to influence society. From this perspective, Beaumont's view of collaboration and authority is similar to that of both Jonson and Shakespeare; however, Beaumont sees the results of his collaborative union with the audience extending outside of the theater.

The conclusion broadens the lens once more and examines the impact of these imagined audiences on the classroom. The coupling of collaboration and invocation throughout these Early Modern dramas gives the playwrights an opportunity to create participatory audiences beyond their sixteenth and seventeenth-century playgoers. My hope is that exploring audience from this perspective helps us to understand our continued fascination with these texts and provide us with practical applications for the classroom. From the reader in a college course to the playgoer in modern London or Edmond, Oklahoma, other audiences join the production, creating longevity for the playwrights and their texts. However, while Shakespeare, Jonson, and Beaumont's works have become a staple in modern culture, students still feel disconnected from these texts. They often approach these dramas as if they have "nothing to do with them." In order to address this paradox between our fascination with these dramas and our students' lack of interest in these texts, I offer several classroom activities: Ann Bertoff's "double-entry notebook," acting troupes, and common-place books. These assignments highlight the collaborative relationship between the playwright and the audience and declare that Early Modern dramas have "something" to do with our students.

¹ In fact, I have arranged this dissertation around these various forms.

² Hirschfeld further discusses the New Bibliographers on page 615. In addition, MacD. P. Jackson's *Defining Shakespeare—Pericles as Test Case* (2003) and Brian Vicker's *Shakespeare, Co-Author* (2002) are two recent additions to this line of thought.

³ Hirschfeld's article also surveys other literary critics who have taken various approaches to collaboration (see pages 615-618 for a discussion of collaborative approaches to Renaissance drama).

CHAPTER I

“FOR ‘TIS YOUR THOUGHTS THAT NOW MUST DECK OUR KINGS”:
THE WRITER/AUDIENCE DYNAMIC ON THE EARLY MODERN STAGE

After watching the theater flag rise above the playhouse and then traveling by boat across the Thames, London’s citizens and tourists would clamor into Bankside’s hottest attraction to watch the afternoon’s performance. Some paid a penny for cushions and others stood in the groundling section waiting for the performance to begin. Following two or three sounds of a trumpet, the audience would turn their attention to the stage and the opening of the afternoon’s entertainment. The uniqueness and importance of this moment is best expressed through the final scenes of the 1998 film *Shakespeare in Love*. As the stuttering tailor-turned-actor fumbles onto the stage to present the opening lines of *Romeo and Juliet*, the theatergoers fall silent, and the actors pray for a miracle. Backstage, the Lord Admiral’s Men are concerned about the prologue for several reasons: if the prologue does not go well, it could affect the outcome of the play. In other words, a horrible prologue indicates to the theatergoers that a terrible play is about to begin; the prologue sets the tone for the production. Also, on another but similar level, if the prologue appears to be funny, as a stuttering rendition of “new mutiny” would be, then the playgoers could find the content of the whole play laughable. Instead of feeling Aristotle’s “pity and fear,” the audience might chuckle and giggle, losing the intent of the tragedy (69). Furthermore, the actors are concerned for their financial security. Vacant

seats equal debt—the premise of Henslowe’s predicament in *Shakespeare in Love*. From this example, we begin to understand that the prologue carries a heavy burden. Much of this weight, I argue, comes from the prologue’s implications for and about the audience.

In this chapter, we will delve into our first representations of audience from the stage: the imagined audiences in the Early Modern prologues. Through the prologues, playwrights approach their audience as collaborators. To support this claim, I start with a discussion of the prologue’s form and function, moving from the Early Modern prologue’s Greek predecessors to the openings of plays by Shakespeare, Marlowe, Fletcher, and Jonson. Significantly, the prologues and the audiences they depict operate as both insiders and outsiders to the production. Though they are physically separated from the performance, they are still co-creators of the performance. In addition to emphasizing this collaborative union, playwrights often used the prologues to invoke their desired audience and to explore the authority in this relationship. Prologues to plays such as *The Roaring Girl* and *Cynthia’s Revels* demonstrate this maneuver.

I

In order to understand how prologues approach the union between the playwright and the audience as a collaborative relationship, we must first describe the prologue and its function. The Early Modern dramatic prologue comes from a long tradition, stemming from Greek discourse, where the first dramatic prologue appeared with the author Thespis around the year 534 B.C. (Hunt 1).¹ As the Greek prologue developed, it took on several formats and traits that remain a part of the Early Modern prologue as well

as the genre of prologues in general. The Greek prologue served as “a sort of running explanation of the development of the plot, accompanied by . . . moral reflections and criticisms on the motives of *dramatis personae*,” similar to the prologue to Christopher Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus* (Bower 2). This prologue outlines the play’s plot: Faustus’ fall from “heavenly matters of theology” (Pro. 19) to “cursed necromancy” (Pro. 25) and critiques the main character’s decline. The prologue calls Faustus’ new profession “a devilish exercise . . . which he prefers before his chiefest bliss” (Pro. 24-27). As the prologue, in “a sort of running explanation,” describes, Dr. Faustus will struggle with his religious salvation and his obsession with magic during the course of the play.

In addition, the English dramatic prologue’s tendency to critique also finds its roots in the Greek. “The later sort of English prologue, in which the characteristic element was criticism of anything and everything, anybody and everybody . . . finds its nearest Greek analogue in the *παράβασις* spoken by the Chorus of the Old Comedy” (Bower 2-3). For example, in Aristophanes’ *Assembly-Women*, the Chorus, a group of married Athenian women, dress as elder men. As they dawn their new apparel and make their way to the Assembly, they not only inherently critique the men, who are not making the decisions the wives want them to make (hence the reason for the wives dressing as men and attempting to vote in the Assembly), but also they criticize the “urban folk” and the new social structure:

Be sure to push aside these urban folk
Before, when the pay was low,
Just a single obol in fact
They’d sit there in the market,

By the garland-makers' stalls,
 To gossip the whole day long.
 But now they come crowding in here!
 It was different in the old days.
 Myronides was general,
 A man of finest stock.
 Then no one got a payment
 For running the city's affairs.
 No, people would come along
 With a flask of wine and some bread,
 Two onions and maybe three olives.
 These days they come for the money:
 Three obols is all they want.
 They've turned this public service
 Into a labourer's job! (300-311)

Similarly, the prologue to Robert Daborne's 1628 "A Christian Turned Turk" criticizes other writers as it attempts to differentiate its tale from previous stories:

What heretofore set others' pens awork,
 Was Ward turned pirate, ours is Ward turned Turk.
 Their trivial scenes might best afford to show
 The baseness of his birth, how from below
 Ambition oft takes roote, makes men forsake
 The good they enjoy, yet know not. Our Muse doth take
 A higher pitch, leaving his piracy
 To reach the heart itself of villainy. (Pro. 7-13)

For this particular prologue, it is important to make the distinction that the upcoming play focuses on a "Ward turned Turk" instead of a "Ward turned pirate" because the latter does not have a place to put the blame for the man's decisions. The former pinpoints the man's villainy as the moment in which the Christian became a Turk. Though the tales have a similar subject, the ward, they have different purposes; the prologue above

critiques previous attempts to tell a similar story. The reference to the “trivial scenes” also passes judgment on the former writer’s use of the word, following the critical style of the Greek Chorus.

The availability and study of Greek texts in the Renaissance connected the Greek Chorus and Prologue to English dramas. Douglas Bruster and Robert Weimann note, through their use of Aelius Donatus’ discussions of comedic structure, that “one can make a general distinction in the kinds of classical prologues available to early modern playwrights.” Plautus and Terence feature the narrative and critical style frequently portrayed in the English prologue:

Plautus’s comedies most frequently feature what Donatus calls the “narrative” prologue—the *argumentativus* form that set out the plot of the play—whereas Terence’s prologues routinely eschew the narration of plot-centred information and instead unfold within the “critical” or *relativus* form that allows Terence to respond to criticism of his dramatic style and practice. (13-14)

Furthermore, as we witness in the era’s borrowing of plots and techniques, “Elizabethan dramatists were infinitely resourceful in adapting and experimenting with their conventional stock-in-trade” (Palmer 503). This “experimenting” and borrowing appears in the English prologue. “The Prologue (deriving from the comedies of Terence and Plautus) and the Chorus (deriving from the tragedies of Seneca), figures originally distinct in function, are essentially means of offering a perspective on the dramatic action” (Palmer 503). The styles of Terence, Plautus, and Seneca found a new home in the English Renaissance.

When the term “prologue” is used in reference to the Early Modern period, it takes on three distinct forms: the “‘prologue’ operates as text, actor, and performance” (Bruster 1). In the Renaissance, the prologue exemplified the text presented as the play begins, the play’s opening, and the actor delivering the speech.² Returning to our *Shakespeare in Love* example, the term “prologue” refers to the sonnet “Two households, both alike in dignity/ In fair Verona where we lay our scene” (Chorus 1-2) as well as the actor whose title is “Prologue” in plays such as *I Tamburlaine the Great* and *The Roaring Girl*.³ Thus, the anonymous prologue actor in John Fletcher’s *The Woman’s Prize* gives the following prologue:

Ladies, to you, in whose defense and right
 Fletcher’s brave Muse prepared herself to fight
 A battle without blood (‘twas well fought, too);
 (The victory’s yours, though got with much ado),
 We do present this comedy, in which
 A rivulet of pure wit flows, strong and rich
 In fancy, language, and all parts that may
 Add grace and ornament to a merry play;
 Which this may prove. (Pro. 1-9)

Nevertheless, an actor entitled Prologue does not have to speak the prologue text. The part of “Chorus” appears in the two most famous prologues of the era: *Romeo and Juliet* and *Henry V*. The Chorus, appearing as the prologue speaker, may also make additional speeches throughout the production, a reflection of its ancestral roots, just as the Greek chorus appeared periodically throughout the play. In addition, the Chorus sometimes appears initially in the middle of the performance. Shakespeare introduces the Chorus,

Time, in the beginning of the fourth act of *The Winter's Tale*. Furthermore, a particular person may speak the prologue, such as Machiavel in *The Jew of Malta* and even the poet John Gower in *Pericles*. The English prologue's ability to be "text, actor, and performance" (Bruster 1) allows it to maneuver between the writer, stage, and theatergoers. The many positions of the prologue make it a prime candidate to include and examine the relationship between the stage, audience, and playwright.

Even though English prologues assumed many dramatic forms (sonnets, monologues, mini-scenes) and used a variety of speakers, the prologue's general function was to introduce. Following three sounds of a trumpet, an actor (or in some cases actors) appeared on the stage, indicating that the play was about to begin. Sometimes the actor wore a "traditional long black velvet cloak" (Chambers 2:547) or, perhaps, attire more suitable to the play: the poet John Gower wears a suit of armor as he gives his long prologue to *Pericles*, the Prologue to *Poetaster* is also armed, and Rumour, covered in tongues, begins *2 Henry IV*. In other instances, similar to the Induction to *Cynthia's Revels*, the black cloak serves as a stage prop. The young boys in the Induction struggle for the garment and the opportunity to give the prologue, mocking the out-of-date fashion of the prologue and yet acknowledging the black cloak's existence. This act represents the prologue as an inescapable part of the production and testifies to the prologue's continuing prominence and valuable function. In addition, as I discuss later, the battle for the cloak parallels collaborative issues of authority.

After appearing on stage, the Prologue began his introduction. The ways in which English dramatic prologues presented their introductory information varied; however, the

goal remained the same: to convey materials to the theatergoers. In fact, the Prologue to Jonson's *Epicene* (1609) emphasizes this point as he criticizes previous writers for "please(ing) the cooks' tastes" and not "the guests" (Pro. 9). The Prologue disapproves of previous poets who wrote prologues for themselves or for "money, wine, and bays" instead of writing prologues for the audience, "guests" (Pro. 3).⁴ The prologue to Christopher Marlowe's *I Tamburlaine the Great* relies on a traditional prologue speaker to convey three introductory topics—the setting, background, and title—and serves as an example of the Early Modern prologue's usual format:

From jiggling veins of rhyming mother wits,
And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,
We'll lead you to the stately tent of war,
Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine
Threat'ning the world with high astounding terms
And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.
View but his picture in this tragic glass,
And then applaud his fortunes as you please. (Pro. 1-8)

While the prologue attempts to move from "jiggling veins of rhyming mother wits" (previous poets and their works), he also introduces the name of the play (*Tamburlaine*), the setting ("stately tent of war"), and the play's genre (tragedy). Still other prologues introduced additional information. Andrea, in *The Spanish Tragedy*, discusses his love, death, and funeral that occurs prior to the play's opening and that is vital to understanding the play's plot. He also introduces the main characters: Bel-Imperia and Don Horatio. Thomas Heywood's *The Four Prentices of London* takes a different approach to the prologue and its conveying of information, parodying the prologue's form and function

while also serving as the prologue. The play begins with “three in black clokes, at three doores” who have arrived, much to the others’ displeasure, to give the prologue (165). As they argue over who is “the prologue,” they discuss three introductory topics: the play’s name, errors, and author.

- 1: I grant you: but I never heard of any that had three heads to one body,
but Cerberus. But what doth your Prologue meane?
- 2: I come to excuse the name of the play.
- 3: I the errours in the Play
- 1: And I the Author that made the Play. (165)

The three men continue until the first acknowledges the awkwardness of having multiple prologue actors: “Spectators, should you oppose your judgments against us: where we are three, which some would think too many, were we three thousand, we think our selves too few” (166). Heywood’s multidimensional prologue draws attention to the many roles the prologue must play, having to introduce so much information that it seems appropriate to have three men, or three thousand, for one prologue. In addition, the prologue to *The Four Apprentices* shows the importance of the prologue’s function. Even if it took three thousand men to perform the prologue, the information is vital enough to account for the time and labor. Announcing the scene, errors, and author brings the playgoers up to speed before Act One. Whether three men or just Andrea gives the prologue, the dramatic device still serves as an introductory asset for the theatergoers, creating a connection between the prologue, its information, and the playgoers.

In addition, the dependability of the prologue's information strengthens the bond between the playgoers and the prologue. "It is commonly assumed that Choruses and Prologues are dramatic devices used to convey necessary and reliable information, that their official function is to speak on behalf of the play, not at variance from it" (Palmer 502). The honest information in the prologue unfolds several layers in our discussion. First, while a connection between the prologue and playgoers occurs through the prologue's conveying of introductory information, the relaying of seemingly "reliable" and dependable information strengthens this bond. Prologues not only brought the playgoers up to speed, but the theatergoers believed the information in the prologue. As we shall witness later in this chapter, the connection helps us to understand the writer/audience relationship. Second, since the prologue unfolds truthful information, we, as critics, can assume that the prologue's observations of the stage and the writer/audience relationship are also accurate, bringing to the surface the play's imperative issues.

While Early Modern prologues do, more often than not, speak truthfully about the performance, many critics have addressed the ambiguity of the Chorus in *Henry V*, noting, as Robert Weimann points out in his *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice*, that "there is great partiality in the business of his [the Chorus'] (re)presentation; the Chorus is made to select from, re-emphasize, misread, even partially obliterate the text of the play" (72). Weimann goes on to note, with the help of Gunter Walch, that the Chorus' ambiguity comes from his discussion of England's impending war with France and with his representation of patriotism:

The Prologue projects a war-like image of “sword and fire” (7) but the play does not contain one battle scene; the second Chorus invokes a stirring altruistic patriotism but a few lines later Pistol and Nym expect that “profits will accrue” (2.1.112) from the war; most irresistibly, the fourth Chorus forecasts the “praise and glory” (31) of Agincourt while the following scene presents us with conscientious objections to the price of “all those legs, and arms, and heads, chopp’d off” (4.1.135-136). (72)

While I agree with Weimann and Walch, the Chorus presents a different image than the play depicts, particularly in the areas listed above, I also believe we can rely on the Chorus’ description of the audience/playwright relationship—the truthfulness of the Chorus’ representation of this union has not come under scrutiny. Furthermore, the Chorus’ unique point of view does not, necessarily, negate the Chorus’ honesty. Recalling Bower’s discussion of the English prologue’s connection to “the Chorus of the Old Comedy” where both contain “criticism of anything and everything, anybody and everybody,” we can also see the Chorus’ misrepresentation as a form of criticism, allowing the prologue to critique the play in progress and, perhaps, further explore the Chorus’ part in Early Modern dramas (2-3). In addition, the Chorus in *Henry V* also serves as an historian, who presents consistently his own interpretation of history, choosing particular highlights through which to emphasize his point, in the same manner in which the rest of the play, acts one through five, presents an interpretation of Henry’s reign, focusing on Henry’s relationship with France. Regardless of whether or not the Chorus is ambiguous throughout this one particular play, most English prologues do present dependable information about the performance and, unquestionably, about the writer/audience relationship.

Before we can whole-heartedly explore the prologue's representations of the audience, we must cross one final hurdle: the question of authorship. The English prologue often sparks debate among literary and historical scholars because of its inherent questions of authorship. It is true that occasionally someone other than the writer of the play (or the writer whose name now appears on the text) wrote the prologue.⁵ Philip Henslowe records two payments to an additional writer for the construction of a prologue and an epilogue. On January 12, 1601, Henslowe, in his diary, admits to paying Thomas Dekker an unknown amount for "A prologe & a epilogue for the playe of ponescious pillet" (187), and in the following year he "Lent vnto Thomas downton the 29 of desemb³ 1602 to paye vnto harey chettell for a prologe & a epilogue for the corte" (207). In addition to Henslowe's recordings, literary criticism confirms the controversy. MacDonald Jackson clarifies the debate over whether or not Shakespeare wrote the Gower chorus to *Pericles*: "Clearly, these choruses were meant to be 'odd'—imitative of the medieval poet's own jingling couplets. But many commentators have noted the contrast between the stiff end-stopped tetrameters of the first two choruses and the more fluid verse of the later choruses" (47). Jackson goes on to determine that the "more fluid verse" is, in fact, Shakespeare's writing, while another writer penned the "stiff end-stopped" lines. As critics, myself included, we have become fascinated with finding the writer of every dramatic line, an admirable adventure in itself, but one that often overshadows other issues in the prologue.

The opposite side of this argument focuses on the prologue's monetary worth. Regardless of authorship, the money paid for prologues and epilogues illustrates their value:

The oldest price of a prologue and epilogue together, of which we have any record, is five shillings. This sum used to be paid by Henslowe to the playwrights who worked for him; and when we consider that often not more than two pounds was given for an entire play, the importance then attached to these brief addresses will be apparent. (Bower 33)

Returning to our *Shakespeare in Love* example, money allowed companies to emerge, theaters to remain open, and theater owners to survive. If Henslowe were willing to spend five shillings on, perhaps, as little as fourteen lines—the Prologue to *Romeo and Juliet* is a sonnet—then we can assume that the prologue played an important role on the Renaissance stage.

The question of authorship, whether it is addressed through a co-authorship perspective or a monetary debate, actually aids our discussion. As Bruster and Weimann note, between 1560 and 1639 many plays had prologues. “For the period in question, then, figures provided by the *Index* suggest that something like 40 percent of the surviving playtexts feature a prologue” (4).⁶ In spite of the author of the prologue or its monetary value, the prologue still persisted as a staple on the Renaissance stage. Furthermore, these speeches presented vital information over and over again throughout the period, creating an intimate connection with the theatergoers and expressing concerns about this relationship. If we assume that the writer of some prologues did not compose the play in production, then, as we shall see, a multitude of writers have the same

sentiments about the audience and its collaborative relationship with the playwright.

Therefore, the ideas presented in the prologue represent the thoughts of an era of writers instead of the sentiments of one writer or one work. The Early Modern prologue captures the audience's relationship with the text as well as the collaborative issues embedded in this relationship.

Considering that English prologues were common stage devices and introduced at least five shillings worth of information, it is hard to believe that these vital parts of the performance have been considered "archaic," "obsequious," "redundant," and "artificial" (Bruster 2). We, as scholars, have overlooked this pivotal stage element. In the following section, I create a new lens through which we can observe the prologue's function in reference to the upcoming performance, thereby elevating our perception of the prologue. I argue that within the theater the prologue occupies a similar space to that of the playgoers—both are insiders and outsiders—and playwrights used the prologue and its position to address and conjure their ideal relationship with the audience. Approaching the prologue from this perspective helps us to re-examine the writer/audience relationship.

II

The few scholars who have explored Early Modern dramatic prologues view them as either a container of historical information or as a multi-functional bridge. The first theory proposes that the narrative and critical nature of the prologue includes a variety of data: "political and social information, records of our theatres, personal and biographical

details in the lives of our dramatists and actors, . . . and the theories of literary workmanship advanced by different authors” (Bower 1-2).⁷ In this model, prologues represent a scrapbook of historical information ready to be flipped through and catalogued. On the other hand, the second theory proposes that the prologues represent and embody transition:

It is precisely because dramatic prologues were asked to—among other things—introduce and request that they took up a position before and apparently “outside” the world of the play. From this crucial position, prologues were able to function as interactive, liminal, boundary-breaking entities that negotiated charged thresholds between and among, variously, playwrights, actors, characters, audience members, playworlds, and the world outside of the playhouse. (Bruster 2)

Bruster and Weimman, two of the few critics who discuss English dramatic prologues, center their argument around the term “liminality” as seen above: “The concepts of ‘liminality’ and ‘threshold’ take their theoretical dimensions, of course, from the work of such anthropologists as Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, where they are fundamental to the examination of ritual and cultural process” (viii). These men use “liminality” to focus on the prologue as a social or cultural transition, moving from mediums of monetary exchange outside the walls of the theater to that within it, and moving from the world of metropolitan London to that of the world inside the theater. Though I agree with the first and second theories (English prologues do contain a plethora of historical information, serve as transitions, and outline “ritual and cultural processes”) neither theory pays enough attention to the prologue’s connections with the

theatergoers. Instead of viewing the prologue merely as a bridge, perhaps guiding the audience from the real world to the play world, we can also view it as a representation of the playgoers and their collaborative relationship with the playwright and text.

At first glance, the prologue's position in relation to the production appears to be simple; however, the prologue, in fact, occupies a quite complicated and unique space, a similar space to the audience it describes. Along with their observations of the prologue as "text, actor, and performance," Bruster and Weimann also accurately place the prologue "'outside' the world of the play" giving the prologue a "place before the dramatic spectacle" (2). Nevertheless, while the prologue is "'outside'" the dramatic action, the prologue still participates in the drama. On the stage, prologues "were, of course, delivered and, when printed, placed before the play in question" (Bruster 57), and, as discussed in the previous section, served a function vital to the impending performance, introducing necessary information. In this respect, the prologue is part of the "performance text," the play presented on the stage (Gurr, *Playgoing* 3), but not part of the primary five acts of the dramatic action.⁸ Even when the Chorus in *Henry V* returns to the stage periodically, he is still separate from the on-going plot and does not interact with the characters. The prologue is both an outsider and an insider, performing as part of the text, yet still separated from the drama by the fourth wall. As we shall uncover, the prologue shares its insider/outsider qualities with the audience it describes. The prologue and the audience are separated from the performance, but they also participate in the production.

I use the term “fourth wall” with some reserve and with purpose. It not only helps us to evaluate the prologue’s position in relation to the theatergoers and the stage, but also gives us a clearer understanding of how the prologue differs from other dramatic devices. The “fourth wall,” an imaginary partition dividing the audience from the action on the stage, is a term used to distinguish moments when performers directly address the audience, particularly in asides, from places where the audience is not addressed, similar to the entire first act of *Romeo and Juliet*. A modern example helps to clarify this technical definition. In the musical *Spamalot*, King Arthur, played by Tim Curry, searches for the Holy Grail until he learns that the cup is under the seat of a theatergoer. His faithful servant, Patsy, politely announces that the grail can be found under C101 “past the fourth wall.”⁹ Though the play has broken the barrier on numerous occasions, the *Spamalot* cast emphasizes this particular moment to bring the destruction to the forefront. King Arthur walks into the audience, retrieves the Holy Grail, and, by doing so, breaks the “fourth wall.” The “fourth wall,” as *Spamalot* correctly uses it, gives us a way to discuss the play’s staging and the relationship of the audience to the play; the term helps to distinguish audience-centered moments from other spaces in the performance. Furthermore, the term applies to the main dramatic action; asides, during the performance, break the “fourth wall.” Where then does the prologue, an outsider to the primary dramatic performance, reside in relation to the fourth wall? The prologue, much like the theatergoers, lives outside of this wall and occurs even before the wall is constructed. Kenneth Branagh’s version of *Henry V* captures this tricky aspect on film.

When the Chorus, played by Derek Jacobi, lights a match and begins the prologue, he reiterates the prologue's position in reference to the play and the audience.

O for a muse of fire, that would ascend
 The brightest heaven of invention:
 A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,
 And monarchs to behold the swelling scene.
 Then should warlike Harry, like himself,
 Assume the port of Mars, and at his heels,
 Leashed in like hounds, should famine, sword, and fire
 Crouch for employment. But pardon, gentles all,
 The flat unraised spirits that hath dared
 On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
 So great an object. (Chor. 1-11)

During his speech, the Chorus walks through the set's backstage, passing lights, props, and equipment, until he reaches, what is presumed to be, the stage door. As he flings the door open, the play begins. The door separates the prologue from the play and represents the beginning of the fourth wall. The prologue, as the film correctly interprets, occurs before the stage door and outside of the following five acts. However, as the Chorus to *Henry V* demonstrates, the prologue also participates in the performance, foreshadowing Harry's wars in France and commenting on elements within the play. Branagh even highlights this particular point throughout the film, placing the Chorus in front of the action in the play—the Chorus appears on the cliffs of Dover—but the Chorus is also distinctly separated from the scene. The Chorus appears in modern rather than sixteenth-century garments, reiterating the imaginary fourth wall that exists between the Chorus and the performance. Nevertheless, while the prologue is outside the action of the play, it

consistently comments on elements within the play. Though a technical definition of the prologue's job and placement in the play clarifies the prologue as both an insider and outsider, in order to understand how this reflects the audience's position, we must first turn to the audience as an insider to the production. Since the prologue provides introductory information and operates as part of the performance text, the prologue participates in the production; however, the theatergoers perform as insiders in a much more intimate way as the prologue describes in its discussions of power and authority.

The prologue's position and function—it is the introductory opening of the production—makes the prologue an optimal location to discuss issues of power and authority. “Separated from the play ‘itself,’ sometimes even in terms of authorship, prologues nonetheless assumed a position of authority in relation to it. From its formal location and provenance, then, the prologue was likely to be a site of inquiry concerning authority” (Bruster 3). In fact, we often think of the authority addressed in the prologue as referring to the “marketable” qualities of the production (Bruster 59) or to the playwright's authoritative power. In addition, since both of these issues include the playgoers, we focus on the theatergoers in relation to the play's writer as a collective that is acted upon, easily manipulated, and prone to persuasion. However, exploring the relationship between the audience and the playwright in the prologue, we witness the questions of power and “authority” in a new light, a view that brings collaboration to the forefront and highlights the “insider” status of the audience. Playwrights, through their imagined audiences in the prologues, envision composition as a collaborative process.

Returning to our *Henry V* example, the prologue in this piece focuses on the self-consciousness of the stage.

Can this cock-pit hold
The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt?
O pardon: since a crooked figure may
Attest in little place a million,
And let us, ciphers to this great account
On your imaginary forces work. (Pro. 11-18)

The Chorus questions the stage's abilities: "Can this cock-pit hold the vasty fields of France?" As Margaret Garber explains the question is a rhetorical one: "the answer of course, is, no. This 'cock-pit' cannot hold the 'vasty field of France,' nor can this 'wooden O' contain all the soldiery and armor that fought in the Battle of Agincourt" (392). While the stage cannot accurately portray the battles, the prologue offers a suggestion to the inadequacies of the stage. Knowing that the stage cannot produce the images alone, the Chorus asks the theatergoers to participate: "For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings/ Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times,/Turning th'accomplishment of many years/ Into an hourglass" (Pro. 28-31). This passage is conscious of what the stage can and cannot do, and in its failure turns to the playgoers: only the theatergoers can bring to life the horses and the turmoil during the Battle of Agincourt.

Similarly, Thomas Dekker's prologue to the *Whore of Babylon* addresses the collaboration between the stage and audience, promising impossible theatrical feats and

insinuating that the audience will have to imagine these spectacles. The prologue begins with a quick invocation for the “Charmes of silence through this Square be throwne” and then continues with a comparison between the landscape and time (Pro. 1):

But as in *Lantskip*, Townes and Woods appeare
 Small a farre off, yet to the Optick sence,
 The mind shewes them as great as those more neere;
 So, winged *Time* that long agoe flew hence
 You must fetch backe, with all those golden yeares
 He stole, and here imagine still hee stands,
 Thrusting his siluer locke into your hands.
 There hold it but two howres, It shall from Graues
 Raize vp the dead: vpon this narrow floore
 Swell vp an Ocean, (with an Armed Fleete,)
 And lay the Dragon at a Doues soft feete.
 These wonders sit and see, sending as guides
 Your iudgement goes vpright: for tho the Muse
 (Thats thus inspir'de) a Nouell path does tread,
 Shee's free from foolish boldness, or base dread. (Pro. 9-24)

Instead of the audience supplying the “fields of France,” Dekker asks the audience to imagine Time and its powers: its ability to raise the dead and turn the floor into an ocean. Obviously, the stage cannot produce these particular effects. It is up to the audience to supply the necessary missing pieces. Once again, the prologue addresses the drawbacks of the stage while also asking for the audience's aid and addressing the collaborative relationship between the stage and the audience.

Since the prologues admit that the theatergoers must help to “deck the fields of France” or imagine Time and its ability to raise the dead, the prologues to both *Henry V* and *The Whore of Babylon* acknowledge the theatergoers' power and authority

throughout the play and emphasize the collaborative relationship between the playwright and the audience. My sentiments here and emphasis on the word “acknowledge” works in opposition to our usual perception of the writer/theatergoer relationship. Normally, as Bruster and Weimann express: “To tell such a varied audience, ‘’tis *your* thoughts that now must deck our kings’ (Pro. 28; emphasis added) expands the margins of indeterminacy in interpretation and expresses considerable confidence in, even bestows authority on, the signifying capacities of ordinary people” (Bruster 142). However, the Chorus to *Henry V* is not just “bestow(ing)” power on the theatergoers, as if the writer is saying “please take some of my authority”; the Chorus acknowledges that the theatergoers share authority with the playwright in some capacity. In other words, an imaginary wall physically separates the theatergoers from the action of the play, but mentally they are still participants. The Chorus to *Henry V* distinguishes the stage as a cooperative space where both the writer and the playgoers work together bring the production to life. Furthermore, the audience is not alone as they imagine the battles and horses; the writer’s verbal depictions of war on the stage, a stage in which hearing is above seeing, intermingle with the theatergoers’ imaginations. This perspective works in much the same way as Harry’s speech and subsequent threat to the Governor of Harfleur. Harry, instead of immediately laying siege to the city, asks the Governor to imagine the bloodshed if he chooses not to surrender:

If not—why, in a moment look to see
 The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand
 Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters;
 Your fathers taken by the silver beards,

And their most reverend heads dashed to the walls;
 Your naked infants spitted upon pikes,
 Whiles the mad mothers with their howls confused
 Do break the clouds, as did the wives of Jewry
 At Herod's bloody-hunting slaughtermen. (3.3.110-118)

While Harry's descriptions aid the Governor's imagination, it takes the Governor to bring Harry's vivid images to fruition. Also, the Governor's mental images of the destruction of a city he is familiar with combines with Harry's view. Similarly, the writer's words help the theatergoers to imagine the fields and battles. The authority of the stage, in this respect, lies between the playgoers and the playwright. The Prologue characterizes a collaborative union, one in which the audience plays an active part, and one in which it takes the playwright and the audience to bring the production to life.

M.M. Bakhtin's collection of four essays, *The Dialogic Imagination*, explains the collaborative qualities of discourse encapsulated in the Chorus. As Bakhtin relates, discourse is complex, interlacing the intentions of the writer and the reception of the theatergoer. In other words, language is not a one-way street.

No living word relates to its object in a *singular* way: between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme, and this is an environment that is often difficult to penetrate . . . The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile. (276)

As the words created by the playwright intermingle with the audience, they encounter a number of defining forces. The utterance comes in contact with the judgments and knowledge of the audience member. Though the playwright may have intended a specific meaning for a word, perhaps intentionally punning on the word “pestle” in Francis Beaumont’s *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (“pestle” refers to mortar and pestle as well as “pissler”), it takes the audience to fulfill the pun.¹⁰ Language or discourse is shaped not only by the transmitter, in this case the playwright, but also by the receptor, the audience. When the writer’s words are presented on the stage, they enter a realm of uncertainty, a space in which the discourse becomes intertwined with the playgoer’s thoughts, judgments, and imagination. Discourse, then, encapsulates a dialogue, a collaborative relationship between the playwright and the audience.

The Chorus to *Henry V* is not the only prologue that emphasizes collaboration. In Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker’s *The Roaring Girl*, the prologue addresses the internal thoughts of the playgoers and particularly their pre-conceived judgments. The prologue announces that each theatergoer brings to the theater and to the production his own image of what a “roaring girl” should be.

Each one comes
And brings a play in’s head with him: up he sums
What he would of a roaring girl have writ;
If that he finds not here, he mews at it. (Pro. 3-7)

The representation of the roaring girl in the play must work with the theatergoers' definitions of an unruly woman. While the description on the stage presents a particular female, Mad Moll, this image intersects with the theatergoers' thoughts. As the two perceptions intermingle, then the discourse will evolve. The writer, or in this case the writers, and the audience "shape discourse," working together to create the stage's presentation (Bahktin 276).

The Prologue to Christopher Marlowe's the *The Jew of Malta* provides a similar description of the audience's preconceived ideas; however, this time the sentiments are not delivered by an actor playing the part of the Prologue, but by Machiavel, the writer of *The Prince*. As Machiavel begins his speech, he addresses the rumors the audience may have heard about him:

Albeit the world think Machiavel is dead,
Yet was his soul but flown beyond the Alps;
And now the Guise is dead, is come from France,
To view this land and frolic with his friends.
To some, perhaps, my name is odious,
But such as love me guard me from their tongues,
And let them know that I am Machiavel,
And weigh not men, and there not men's words. (Pro. 1-8)

In addition to negating the rumor that he is dead, he also draws attention to how the audience might see him, as an "odious" man. After addressing these issues, Machiavel asks the audience to put aside their moral judgments against him in order to see Barabas "as he deserves, and let him not be entertained the worse/ Because he favors me" (Pro. 33-35). Apart from hoping that the audience can put aside their thoughts and embrace

Barabas for who he is, Machiavel also emphasizes the intermingling of the audience's judgments with the discourse presented on the stage.

These English prologues address the audience as collaborators, and, at the same time, invoke their ideal audience, just as Ede and Lunsford describe. In Early Modern dramas, writers address the audience of their rhetorical situation, the theatergoers, as collaborators and attempt to use the text to "give life to their conception of the reader" (167). The same words that portray the theatergoers as collaborators serve as "cues" for the reader and for the text's future audiences (167). Therefore, in the prologues, playwrights address and invoke their audience as collaborators. However, playwrights not only use the prologues to draw attention to this collaborative relationship, but also, on occasion, as an attempt to sway the authority in this union in the playwright's favor. We see this maneuver in Harry's words above and in Machiavel's opening speech. As Harry acknowledges the Governor's collaborative participation, Harry's images also try to persuade the Governor to see the impending battle in a certain way. Harry through his threat wants the Governor to give up the city instead of going to battle. In addition, Machiavel's discussion of the rumors surrounding his death also endeavors to use the same tactic. Machiavel brings certain issues to the audience's attention and then asks the audience not to let these matters affect their judgment, creating a masked method of persuasion. Similarly, several prologues address and invoke a collaborative audience and then help shape the audience's participation and the production's presentation. Playwrights while collaborating with the audience, are, at times, also examining how this relationship could operate. This investigation does not negate the audience's

participation or the collaborative relationship between the playwright and the audience.

It does, however, introduce issues of authority inherent in collaborative practices. As we shall see in chapters two through four, in Early Modern dramas collaboration takes on many forms.

Returning to our *Roaring Girl* example, after the prologue acknowledges that the theatergoers arrive with a particular picture of a roaring girl in their heads, the prologue attempts to alter this image. The prologue promises the theatergoers that the “roaring girl” in the performance is one which the audience could not have imagined; she is a new breed.

Only we entreat you think our scene
Cannot speak high, the subject being but mean.
A roaring girl (whose notes till now never were)
Shall fill with laughter our vast theater;
That's all which I dare promise. (Pro. 7-11)

After essentially hooking the playgoers with a promise of a new unruly woman, the prologue proceeds to explain the “tribe” of girls that theatergoers probably picture in their heads. The prologue highlights a woman who “roars at midnight in deep tavern bowls,” another who “beats the watch, and constables controls,” and finally, one who “roars i'th'daytime, swears, stabs, gives braves,/ Yet sells her soul to the lust of fools and slaves” (Pro. 16-20). The prologue promises the theatergoers that they will see a new “roaring girl” to add to the “tribe” and then describes stereotypical unruly women, attempting to create Middleton and Dekker's view of a boisterous woman and invoke their ideal audience, a collaborative audience that allows their mental picture to mingle

with the playwrights' words, crafting a portrait of Mad Moll; the prologue, though it admits that all of the playgoers already have a mental picture of a roaring girl, seeks to alter or negotiate this image. The prologue even goes so far as to replace (or at least attempt to replace) any preconceived images with a picture of Mad Moll: "Yet what need characters, when to give a guess/ Is better than the person to express?/ But would you know who 'tis? Would you hear her name?/ She is called Mad Moll; her life our acts proclaim" (Pro. 27-30). This final rhetorical move, particularly the questions addressed to the audience, implies that the playgoers' mental "characters" will combine with the playwrights' view to create the most unruly woman of them all, Mad Moll. The prologue's shift from mental thoughts and judgments to stereotypes and finally to Mad Moll incorporates and plays upon the playgoers' original mental images. In only thirty lines, the prologue acknowledges the cooperative nature of the stage and states that the theatergoers' mental images will mix with that of the performance, creating the performance and a particular "roaring girl." The playwrights ultimately hope to shape the theatergoers' imaginations towards their view of Mad Moll, highlighting the playwright's attempt to create his ideal audience and highlight the issues of authority inherent in a collaborative relationship.

Ben Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels* also addresses the collaborative relationship between the playwright and the audience while also attempting to conjure Jonson's ideal audience. After two blows of a trumpet, three boys, who will be players in the following production and who present themselves as such, appear on the stage to give the

Induction/Prologue to *Cynthia's Revels*. Immediately, the three argue, as the second and third boys try to decide who should give the prologue.

1. Pray you away; why, fellows? God's so? What do you mean?
2. Marry, that you shall not speak the prologue, sir.
3. Why? Do you hope to speak it?
2. Aye, and I think I have most right to it: I am sure I studied it first.
3. That's all one, if the author think I can speak it better.
1. I plead possession of the cloak: gentles, your suffrages, I pray you. (Pro. 1-7)

This three-way argument, similar to the prologue in *The Four Prentices of London*, centers around authority: who did the writer tell to give the prologue? which boy has the authority to present the information? When it is decided that the first boy, who drew the shortest straw, should give the prologue, the third boy proclaims he will not go until he has ruined the performance: "I'll do something now afore I go in, though it be nothing but to revenge myself on the author: since I speak not his prologue. I'll go tell al the argument of his play aforehand, and so stale his invention to the auditory before it come forth" (Pro. 29-32). The comedic tension here between the boy and the writer creates an air of competitiveness that eventually turns to the writer/audience collaborative relationship. The third boy presents what he perceives to be the plot of the play and the other two boys occasionally interject their thoughts. This action takes the playwright's plot and adds the boys' thoughts in order to create the Induction. The playwright and the boys are co-creators of the performance.

After "revenging" himself on the playwright, telling the theatergoers the necessary information the prologue is supposed to present anyways but in his own

fashion, the third boy decides he will perform as various theatergoers, again presenting a collaborative relationship between the playwright and audience. The first is an “ignorant critic” (Pro. 93): “Now, sir, suppose I am one of your gentle auditors, that am come in (having paid my money at the door, with much ado) and here I take my place, and sit down: I have three sorts of tobacco in my pocket, my light by me, and thus I begin” (Pro. 100-104). Furthermore, he eventually takes on the guise of a “gathered gallant” (Pro. 117). The Gallant asks to see the writer so that he can talk with him about the production:

Troth, I have no such serious affair to negotiate with him, but what may very safely be turned upon thy trust. It is in the general behalf of this fair society here that I am to speak, at least the more judicious part of it, which seems much distasted with the immodest and obscene writing of many in their plays.
(Pro. 156-161)

The third boy’s representation of a “gathered gallant” as well as his previous assumptions about the playwright envisions not only a comedic competition between the boy and the playwright but also a collaborative relationship. Though the gallant and the third boy do not act, perhaps, in the most desirable fashion and though the gallant assumes the playwright is literally back stage and can be easily summoned, they do present an underlying collaborative relationship between the playwright and the playgoers. The boy, as well as the some-what snooty gallant he depicts, has the ability to communicate with the playwright, as if the audience and the playwright are in dialogue during the production. The playwright and the audience work together to create the production.

Furthermore, the prologue attempts to move the authority of the performance in the playwright's favor.

Following the third boy's depiction of the gallant, the second boy gives the play's intended prologue and starts to craft the audience into a "learned" and elite group:

If gracious silence, sweet attention,
Quick sight, and quicker apprehension,
(The lights of judgement's throne) shine anywhere;
Our doubtful author hopes this is their sphere.
And therefore opens he himself to those;
To other weaker beams his labours close:
As loth to prostitute their virgin strain.
To every vulgar and adulterate brain. (Pro. 1-8)

In this part of the induction and prologue Jonson turns to flattery, telling the audience that they are "quick" or they would not be watching the performance. This rhetorical strategy helps shape the audience's participation and helps Jonson move the authority in the collaborative relationship towards the playwright.

Flattering the theatergoers is, perhaps, the most common example of how playwrights address and invoke audience participation while also bringing collaborative issues of authority to the forefront. The prologue to John Fletcher's *The Elder Brother* promises not to praise the writer or the performance until the theatergoers have approved of the comedy:

But that it would take from our modesty,
To praise the Writer, or the Comedie,
Till your faire suffrage crowne it: I should say,
Y'are all most welcome to no vulgar Play;
And so farre we are confident; and if he

That made it, still lives in your memory;
 You will expect what we present tonight,
 Should be judg'd worthy of your eares and sight. (EEBO)

The prologue flatters the theatergoer's ability to judge the play—it is up to the playgoers to decide the “worthy(ness)” of the performance—thereby, attempting to win the theatergoers over before the first act. The prologue insinuates that a well-versed playgoer, one that has the “memory(ies)” of other performances by Fletcher, will judge the play properly, “crowne(ing)” or praising the upcoming performance. This action attempts to shape the audience into the playwright's desired position and move the authority in the relationship towards the playwright. In this case, he wants an audience that will distinguish the play as “worthy.”

Looking at the prologue's form, function, and content as well as its representations of the audience allows us to see how Early Modern playwrights often address and invoke a collaborative relationship with the audience while also, at times, attempting to negotiate the authority in this union, highlighting issues of authority inherent in collaborative relationships. However, the prologues only instigate our discussion of the many “imagined audiences” and their purposes in Early Modern dramas. In the following chapters, we will continue to look at representations of audience from the stage, particularly fictional auditors and actors, in primary works by William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Francis Beaumont. Plays such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Alchemist*, and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* continue to use their imagined audiences to present a collaborative relationship between the playwright and

the audience as well as examining the dynamic in this union. Furthermore, playwrights, once again, invoke their ideal audiences and collaborators. Nevertheless, each playwright has a different yet similar view of his model audience, presenting various forms the collaborative relationship could assume. In addition, the next three chapters and conclusion further expand the definition of audience to include actors as well as imagined and future audiences.

¹ For a further discussion of prologues and their connections to non-dramatic works, see Losse, Deborah. *Sampling the Book*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1994.

² See Douglas Bruster and Robert Weimann's *Prologues to Shakespeare's Theatre* chapter one "The Elizabethan Prologue" for a more in-depth discussion of the general distinctions I discuss here. Bruster and Weimann distinguish the three definitions of the English dramatic prologue as "text, actor, and performance" (1) terms that they use to theorize about the prologue's "liminality." Since prologues are an often overlooked genre, I feel, much like Bruster and Weimann, that it is necessary to define the term "prologue." Also, see Bower's discussion for a more archival look at the prologue as it changed over time.

³ All references to Shakespearean plays are from *The Norton Shakespeare* unless otherwise stated.

⁴ The prologue to Jonson's *Epicene* also follows the style of the Greek Chorus. It critiques other writers for their lack of judgment.

⁵ A lengthy discussion of co-authorship would detract from my purpose here; however, the debate about authorship still continues. See Brian Vicker's *Shakespeare Co-Author*, the introduction to *Cardenio* (Editor Charles Hamilton), MacDonald Jackson's *Defining Shakespeare—Pericles as Test Case*, and Mark Dominik's *Shakespeare-Middleton Collaborations* for a more in-depth approach.

⁶ "Index" refers to the *Index of Characters in Early Modern Drama: Printed Plays, 1500-1660*. In addition, this book, according to Bruster and Weimann "lists some

671 surviving plays” (4). Furthermore, Bruster and Weimann also go on to warn us that even though prologues were attached to 40 percent of the plays, it does not mean that prologues were always fashionable. The percentage varies in several decades; however, the overall percentage is 40 (4).

⁷ Bower’s *A Study of the Prologue and Epilogue in English Literature from Shakespeare to Dryden* approaches prologues and epilogues from a historical point of view and furthers our understanding of the prologue over time. Though I am interested more in the prologue as a conversation of the stage and less of its overall historic value, Bower and I attempt to elevate the prologue to its proper position in the theater. We just use two separate vehicles.

⁸ Andrew Gurr uses the term “performance text” to differentiate the text performed on the stage and the printed text or the “second publication,” a term Gurr borrows from Francis Beaumont. For more about the differences between a “performance text” and a “second publication” see not only Gurr’s *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London*, 2004, page 3, but also Dobranski’s *Reader’s and Authorship in Early Modern England*.

⁹ Consequently, the spectator sitting in seat C101 also gets his or her picture taken with the cast and gets to literally become part of the production, walking onto the stage and performing as part of a musical number.

¹⁰ We will further explore this joke in the last chapter.

CHAPTER II

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION AND FICTIONAL AUDITORS IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*

At the end of Michael Hoffman's 1999 film version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Puck, played by Stanley Tucci, symbolically sweeps the streets of Athens, cleaning up the turmoil he has caused. He then turns to the camera and the audience to deliver the epilogue:

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended:
That you have but slumbered here,
While these visions did appear;
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend.
If you pardon, we will mend.
Else Puck a liar call.¹

Uniquely, the director and screenwriter Michael Hoffman does not simply let Puck give the play's famous final lines. Following the above sentiments, Puck turns to a window overlooking the street, Bottom's window. Bottom pulls a ring that Titania gave him from his pocket and stares longingly into the darkness. As if to confirm that Bottom's relationship with Titania (an intimate affair between an ass and a fairy queen) and ultimately the audience's interactions with the film were not a dream, several small

fairies appear. They twinkle at Bottom and then fly into the darkness, creating the stars in the night sky. The scene then returns to Puck, who concludes the epilogue and flings the broom over his shoulder, walking merrily out of the city.

Hoffman's suggestion that what the audience and Bottom saw was non-fiction instead of fiction introduces one version of how we examine and interpret the many references to the audience in Shakespeare's festive comedy. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* contains numerous allusions to auditors—"I'll be an auditor—an actor, too, perhaps if I see cause" Puck proclaims (3.1.67-68)—and these varied moments within the play have sparked countless film and stage interpretations.² Whether we believe Michael Hoffman's depiction of the play's final lines or whether we are disheartened by such a leap, it helps move us towards an inescapable discussion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and its considerations of the audience.

In the previous chapter we explored the ways in which prologues, such as those in *The Roaring Girl* and *Henry V*, portray theatergoers as collaborators, highlighting how playwrights envision a collaborative relationship between the playwright and the audience, invoking the playwright's ideal collaborative audience, and bringing issues of authority within this union to the forefront. This chapter continues our exploration of "imagined" or staged audiences; however, we will focus not only on Shakespeare's examination of audience participation throughout *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but also on another form of the audience: fictional auditors. While *A Midsummer Night's Dream* continues to approach the audience as collaborators, it also examines this relationship through continuous discussions of audience participation, including Egeus' complaint

against his daughter's love for Lysander and the play-within-the-play, *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Throughout the performance, Shakespeare delves into how he envisions the playwright/audience relationship operating, connecting the intimate relationship between Hermia and her love to the intimate union between the audience and the playwright. Furthermore, through his fictional auditor Theseus and his endorsements of audience participation, Shakespeare uniquely establishes his identity by not only invoking his ideal audience but also by imagining this audience as skilled and vital co-creators. Shakespeare's model audience intentionally helps bring the play to fruition, helping create the performance's meaning. His audience is a constructive and essential partner. Furthermore, Shakespeare does not directly assert or attempt to negotiate his authority within the collaborative relationship. Perhaps it is this silence that helps create his identity and negotiate his authority.

I

Shakespeare begins his examination of audience participation with a subtle endorsement of an active audience. When the play opens, the audience witnesses an impatient and, at times, militaristic discussion of romance and a disgruntled father's complaint about his unruly daughter. After Theseus and Hippolyta have a brief lover's moment, conferring about their nuptials and who wooed whom, or, perhaps, should I say "who defeated whom," Egeus, Hermia's father, enters the scene "full of vexation" (1.1.22).³ His daughter has fallen in love with the wrong man; she wants to marry Lysander instead of her father's choice, Demetrius. Since Egeus' distress has had little

sway with his daughter, Egeus brings his accusations against the romance, and particularly against Lysander, to the Duke of Athens. Theseus listens to Egeus as he accuses Lysander of stealing and enchanting, and as Egeus asks for ancient justice: Egeus has fatherly rights, and he wants to “dispose of” Hermia as he pleases:

Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes,
 And interchanged love tokens with my child.
 Thou hast by moonlight at her window sung
 With feigning voice verses of feigning love,
 And *stol’n the impression of her fantasy*
 With bracelets of thy hair rings, gauds, conceits,
 Knacks, trifles, nosegays, sweetmeats—messengers
 Of strong prevailment in *unhardened* youth.
 With cunning hast thou filched my daughter’s heart,
 Turned her obedience which is due to me
 To stubborn harshness. And, my gracious Duke,
 Be it so she will not here before your grace
 Consent to marry with Demetrius,
 I beg the ancient privilege of Athens:
 As she is mine, I may dispose of her,
 Which shall be either to this gentleman
 Or to her death, according to our law
 Immediately provided in that case. (1.1.28-45; emphasis added)

Egeus’ distress contains many elements: he is angry that his daughter has gone against his will, he has lost the ability to “impress” upon her his own notions, and he disapproves of the manner in which Lysander has “stol’n” Hermia’s heart. His words are those of a father with a teenage daughter. Nevertheless, embedded in this tirade of parental control, we find *A Midsummer Night’s Dream’s* opening discussion of audience.

In Egeus’ complaint, Lysander, the poet/lover, has “stol’n” Hermia’s “impression” from Egeus, insinuating that others, particularly Egeus and Lysander, can

mold Hermia as they wish. “Hermia becomes a character stamped upon blank wax. It is her father’s right to impress his own image upon his wax, to imprint a figure or disfigure it, to dictate what she represents and what she represents to herself” (Marshall 552). And, since Lysander has done the imprinting in this case, he has drawn Egeus’ anger. Using the play’s presentation of molding and imprinting as evidence, scholars often compare the relationship Egeus describes between lover and beloved, between Hermia and her poet, to the bond between the playwright/poet and the audience. While examining *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* “to argue that Shakespeare presents these tensions between what we call dramatic and performance text as critical,” Sunhee Kim Gertz discusses the role of the audience and of the playwright in Egeus’ speech (153). Though Gertz uses the example to describe the “imaginative persuasion” and the “literary and rhetorical traditions of love,” Gertz’s discussion also hits upon our usual perception of this scene:

In bringing the rhetorical traditions of love to the stage, Egeus refers to Lysander’s pursuit of his daughter as a theft of the “impression of her fantasy”, a phrase which positions Hermia as the audience “im-pressed” by the lover-poet in that meeting ground between audience and author, the imagination. (157)

Furthermore, Gertz asserts that the relationship Egeus describes is that of a “passive audience, one succumbing to the rhetorical power of the speaker to shape and guide the imagination, thereby evoking the traditional picture of the orator subjugating his audience to his will” (157). I agree with Gertz’s representative correlation of Lysander and Hermia to that of the poet and audience; however, I question the outcome of this union, the usual reading of this scene, and the ways in which Shakespeare uses this depiction.⁴

Is this a simple case of a passive audience and a persuasive speaker? In addition, though the scene contains only one lover/poet, two characters emerge as competing orators: Lysander, accused of impressing without permission, and Egeus, fighting for his right to mold his daughter. In order to understand the position of speaker/speakers and audience in this moment and how it endorses and examines collaboration, we must look at both Egeus and Lysander and how *A Midsummer Night's Dream* fully envisions their relationships with Hermia.

When Hermia and Egeus first appear on the stage, we meet a monarchical father, who believes his will is the only will, and his unruly and difficult child, very different from the passive, quiet, and malleable daughter we often envision Hermia representing. In fact, Hermia will not give into her father's wishes so much so that Egeus has to bring his domestic problem into a public forum. "Full of vexation come I," declares Egeus to the Duke, "with complaint/ Against my child, my daughter Hermia" (1.1.22-23). In addition, Hermia's resistance to her father's wishes has forced him to make not only a public complaint but also to request to see her married to Demetrius or see her dead: Egeus will give Hermia "to this gentleman (Demetrius)/ Or to her death" (1.1.43-44). As the scene progresses, the Duke attempts to settle the dispute between Hermia and Egeus; however, his ability to control Hermia falls under dispute. After Egeus has given his ultimatum—die or marry Demetrius—the Duke steps in to mediate the argument. He turns to Hermia and asks for her opinion while also drawing upon Egeus' previous image of Hermia as "impress(ionable)."

What say you, Hermia? Be advised fair maid.
 To you your father should be as a god,
 One that composed your beauties, yea, and one
To whom you are but as a form in wax,
By him imprinted, and within his power
 To leave the figure or disfigure it.
 Demetrius is a worthy gentleman. (1.1.46-52; emphasis added)

Theseus initially supports Egeus' complaint: Egeus, by Athenian law, has the right to mold Hermia as he pleases. However, Theseus' words also negate Hermia's passivity. Though she may be but a form in wax, Theseus asks the wax to speak and participate in the proceedings not only in this case, but again shortly thereafter. The Duke continues to ask for Hermia's response as he alters Egeus' ultimatum. Egeus declares Hermia must marry Demetrius or die, but Theseus proposes a third option—"to adjure/ For ever the society of men" (1.1.66)—promoting Hermia's active involvement in her own fate and dismantling the image of her as a malleable form waiting for her father to shape her. She is allowed to choose what will happen to her, and she has the option to not follow her father's desires.

As if subtly including Hermia in her own fate does not deconstruct the image of a passive audience and a monarchical playwright, Shakespeare further questions Egeus' authority. After verbalizing his anger and bringing the threat of tragedy into this festive comedy, Egeus remains silent until act four when Egeus and Theseus discover the lovers in the woods. When the Duke demands to know how Lysander and Demetrius, sworn enemies, could "sleep by hate, and fear no enmity" (4.1.142), Lysander admits that he and Hermia ran away to escape Athens. Breaking his three-act silence, Egeus declares,

Enough, enough, my lord, you have enough.
 I beg the law upon his head.—
 They would have stol'n away, they would, Demetrius,
 Thereby to have defeated you and me—
 You of your wife, and me of my consent,
 Of my consent that she should be your wife. (4.1.151-156)

Though his first complaint to the Duke ended, somewhat, in Egeus' favor (his desire was still an option), in this episode, Theseus whole-heartedly sides with the lovers. "Egeus, I will overbear your will,/ For in the temple by and by with us/ These couples shall be eternally knit" (4.1.176-178). Not only does the Duke alter Egeus' demand, but he also finds in favor of the lovers. Egeus, again, falls silent, opting to not appeal or argue Theseus' decision. At this point, in some versions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Egeus never returns to the stage, and if he does, as *The Norton Shakespeare* notes, Egeus serves as the "manager of mirth," announcing the plays prepared for the wedding celebration (5.1.35):

Q does not call for Egeus, but gives all his speeches to Philostrate (the character briefly addressed in 1.1). F's substitution here may be a mistake (the possible result of the same actor playing both the parts in an early performance) or an attempt to incorporate the angry father into the festive close. (581)

Theseus' thwarting of Egeus' desire to mold Hermia and Egeus' silence deters a reading of this scene as a passive audience subjugated to the speaker's rhetorical power, and endorses audience participation in the playwright/theatergoer relationship.

Examining Hermia's relationship with her father uncovers only half of the perception under dispute. At least in the father/daughter analogy, the play questions Hermia's passivity and Egeus' control; however, I admit, this leaves us with Lysander. Is Hermia "subjugated" to the will of the lover/poet? Does Shakespeare portray Lysander as a powerful rhetorical figure who can impress his thoughts on his audience? In his complaint, Egeus describes Lysander as a thief in the night, who has stolen Hermia's affections with no more than trinkets and words: "This hath bewitched the bosom of my child./ Thou, thou, Lysander, thou has given her rhymes, and interchanged love tokens with my child" (1.1.27-29). This accusation pinpoints Lysander as a great poet of words and a sorcerer, and resembles the claim of another Shakespearean father figure, Brabantio.⁵ In *Othello*, Brabantio, Desdemona's father, accuses his daughter's lover of casting a spell to conjure her affection. He goes in front of the Duke, proclaiming Othello has stolen Desdemona "by spells and medicines bought of mountebanks. For nature so preposterously to err,/ Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense,/ Sans witchcraft could not" (1.3.61-64).⁶ I mention the connection here between *Othello* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to bring into question each father's picture of his daughter's lover. Since, in both instances, we learn of the love affairs from the accusations of an irate father, Shakespeare questions the content of these claims. Though Egeus sees Lysander as having the ability to steal "the impression of her (Hermia's) fantasy," we can assume this representation is not entirely the truth. Does Hermia love Lysander because Lysander, the poet, has made it so? The evidence suggests that Hermia does not give herself and her affections away so readily and that the audience is not easily malleable.

When Theseus declares that Hermia must choose her fate, Hermia replies with adamant resolve that her choice to love is a choice that she has made:

So will I grow, so live, so die, my lord,
Ere I will yield my virgin patent up
Unto his lordship whose unwished yoke
My soul consents not to give sovereignty. (1.1.79-82)

Hermia decides to live her life as a virgin, rather than give into her father's demands. This action provides insight into her affections and her method for choosing her love. According to her own declaration, once again supporting her as an active rather than a passive audience, Hermia will only give her affections to someone she approves. If anything controls Hermia here, we can assume it is her soul, not trifles or words, that forces her to give "sovereignty." Furthermore, after Hermia has made this decision, it remains constant throughout the play while Lysander, the supposed great rhetorical persuader, proves fickle, falling under the spell of the love-in-idleness flower. In Act Three, he quickly throws away his affections for Hermia and begins to dote on Hermia's friend, Helena. Instead of faltering after Lysander declares "that I do hate thee (Hermia) and love Helena" (3.2.282), Hermia turns her anger against Helena, remaining loyal to her lover Lysander: "O me, you juggler, you canker blossom,/ You thief of love—what, have you come by night/ And stol'n my love's heart from him?" (3.2.283-285). If Hermia's affections responded only to words and trinkets, at this point in the play, Hermia would have found another lover and rejected Lysander. Even though we often

assume the references to impressionability and wax represent the audience as malleable, Hermia's relationship with Lysander works against this perspective.

Through his representation of Hermia, Shakespeare begins to approach the position of the audience and indirectly the place of the playwright working within a collaborative venture, examines how this union functions, and uses his understanding of this relationship to invoke his model collaborators. For Shakespeare, the playwright does not operate as Egeus does; he does not attempt to "impress" his will upon his audience. He also does not act like a fickle friend, who, at times, is easily swayed to disregard his relationship with the audience. In contrast, the playwright is a constant companion, and the audience is an *active* collaborator; Hermia chooses to love Lysander and to go against her father's wishes. As the play progresses, Shakespeare continues to explore and endorse active collaboration in the play-within-play, connecting the intimacy Hermia and Lysander eventually achieve through marriage with the intimacy Shakespeare envisions between the playwright and the audience. Shakespeare, through Hermia, works to make the audience conscious of their position in his view of the playwright/audience collaborative relationship.⁷ Furthermore, Shakespeare's depiction of Hermia begins to construct his ideal audience, an audience that defines collaboration as Shakespeare does and that is not easily malleable or bewitched. His ideal audience, as we shall see through Theseus, brings its own desires to the relationship and constructively partners with the playwright. Shakespeare carries this invocation of his ideal collaborators from the opening moments of the performance to the final scenes of the comedy.

II

Building upon the play's opening scene and its depiction of an active audience, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* continues to examine the audience/playwright relationship through its play-within-a-play in Act Five. Often, discussions of the play-within-a-play focus on the performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, along with its stage audience's reactions, in the play's final act; however, the Rude Mechanicals' production is a process, similar to Shakespeare's invocation of his ideal audience, that begins in Act One and concludes in the Athenian palace. Looking at *Pyramus and Thisbe* from the handing out of the scripts to the death of Pyramus uncovers the complicated representations of audience and the subtleties that examine the playwright/audience relationship. Furthermore, approaching the Rude Mechanicals and their production from this perspective allows us to observe how the references to audience in the play build upon each other in order for Shakespeare to conjure his ideal collaborators.

When the Rude Mechanicals enter the stage for the first time, they stand on a street in Athens in anxious anticipation, waiting to learn their play and parts for the upcoming nuptial performance. Peter Quince, the director, organizes the players, and Bottom, the weaver, clamors for attention. Though Bottom has been given the part of Pyramus, the title role, he offers to play the other characters as well, including the part of Thisbe and the lion: "An I may hide my face, let me play Thisbe too," Bottom interjects, "I'll speak in a monstrous little voice: 'Thisne, Thisne! --'Ah Pyramus, my lover dear, thy Thisbe dear and lady dear" (1.2.43-45). And, only a few lines later, he asks for a third part, the lion, a role already given to Snug the joiner. "Let me play the lion too."

Bottom proclaims, “I will roar that I will do any man’s heart good to hear me. I will roar that I will make the Duke say ‘Let him roar again; let him roar again’” (1.2.58-60).

Bottom’s second comment identifies the audience that will view his performance, the Duke, and turns the Rude Mechanicals’ discussion to audience response: “An you should do it too terribly,” states Peter Quince, “you would fright the Duchess and the ladies that they would shriek, and that were enough to hang us all” (1.2.61-63). Within this seemingly random discussion of parts, Shakespeare embeds his second examination of the audience/playwright relationship.

When Quince proclaims, on the streets of Athens, “An you should do it too terribly you would fright the Duchess and the ladies that they would shriek, and that were enough to hang us all” (1.2.61-63), he makes a complex statement about the position of the audience and the authority of the stage. At first glance, the statement appears to say that Quince and the mechanicals believe the audience has complete control over the production—if the Rude Mechanicals displease their audience, they will be killed. In other words, Quince and his players perceive the audience as what Ede and Lunsford denote as “audience addressed”:

Those who envision audience as addressed emphasize the concrete reality of the writer’s audience; they also share the assumption that knowledge of this audience’s attitudes, beliefs, and expectations is not only possible (via observation and analysis) but essential. Questions concerning the degree to which this audience is “real” or imagined, and the ways it differs from the speaker’s audience, are generally either ignored or subordinated to a sense of the audience’s powerfulness. (156)

The Rude Mechanicals imagine a specific audience (the Duke and his court) which they believe have certain “beliefs” and “expectations” about the stage and which they cater to throughout their preliminary meetings and in their final production. In this case, the Rude Mechanical’s humorously and perilously, as we shall see in Act Five, place too much emphasis on the audience. Each time they appear on stage, Quince and his troupe of volunteer actors practice with this audience in mind and attempt to cater to what they believe the audience will want. In fact, they write several prologues in order to appeal to their audience and to assure the Athenians that the production will not frighten them. In Act Three, the company begins to create their openings:

QUINCE: What sayst thou, bully Bottom?

BOTTOM: There are things in this comedy of *Pyramus and Thisbe* that will never please. First Pyramus must draw a sword to kill himself, which the ladies cannot abide, How answer you that?

Snout: By’r la’kin, a parlous fear.

STARVELING: I believe we must leave the killing out, when all is done.

BOTTOM: Not a whit. I have a device to make all well. Write me prologue, and let the prologue seem to say we will do no harm with our swords, and that Pyramus is not killed indeed; and for the more better assurance, tell them that I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver. This will put them out of Fear. (3.1.7-20)

In addition to this particular prologue and the lion’s prologue, the Rude Mechanicals also write prologues for “Wall” and “Moonshine”; however, the prologues for “Wall” and “Moonshine” are not meant to put the audience at ease, but to inform them that the man holding the lantern is moonshine, and the man holding “some plaster, or some loam, or some rough-cast” is “Wall” (3.1.58). This depiction of the “audience addressed,” placing

too much stake in a particular audience, only begins to unpack Quince's remarks and the Rude Mechanicals' approach to the audience.

While the Rude Mechanicals place a heavy emphasis on their Athenian audience, they also accentuate their own position. They assume that their performance will "fright the Duchess and the ladies" (1.2.62). In other words, the mechanicals believe that their marvelous production can turn a man into a lion. As the troupe practices in the Athenian forest, Snout questions if the ladies will "be afeard of the lion?" (3.1.25), and Bottom confirms that they will. "Masters, you ought to consider with yourself, to bring in—God shield us—a lion among ladies is a most dreadful thing; for there is not a more fearful wild fowl than your lion living, and we out to look to't" (3.1.27-30). Both Bottom and Snout assume that Snug, who wants the lion's part, a series of growls, to be written out for him, is a "fearful wild fowl." When this exchange emphasizes Snug's ability to be not just a man but also a lion, it places little trust in the audience to differentiate fact from fiction. Through the eyes of the Rude Mechanicals, the audience has no ability to separate the world of the stage from the world of reality.

The Mechanicals' simultaneous belief in the audience's control over the performance and their distrust of the audience's ability to distinguish fact from fiction creates a paradox and, once again, uncovers Shakespeare's understanding of collaboration. The Rude Mechanicals either give too much control to their audience, (audience addressed), or they do not give the audience enough credit or authority: the ladies will scream, believing the lion is a real lion; they will cry, believing Pyramus is actually dead; and they will hang the mechanicals for putting them through this emotional

turmoil. Shakespeare gives these two conflicting views to an untrained company, who attempt to integrate these opposing positions in the prologues, and works to question both perceptions of the audience while also creating humor. It is hilarious that the Rude Mechanicals approach their audience from these perspectives, and it is problematic to make such assumptions about the audience.

Theseus gives voice to this contradiction when he addresses Starveling's performance. When Starveling appears on the stage, he presents his prologue and explains that he is the man in the moon, and Theseus, a fictional auditor, questions Starveling's desire to make this fact known.

STARVELING: This lantern doth the horned moon present. Myself the man
i'th'moon do seem to be.

THESEUS: This is the greatest error of all the the rest—the man should be put
into the lantern. How is it else the man i'th'moon? (5.1.235-239).

Theseus' critique of Starveling's performance indicates that the Rude Mechanicals' perceptions of the audience, the two opposing views they attempt to reconcile on the stage, do not accurately portray the speaker/audience relationship. While the Rude Mechanicals' perceptions of the audience do encompass a relationship between the playwright (or playwrights in this case) and the audience—Peter Quince and the company construct the script and the prologues—Shakespeare stresses that this is not how he views the playwright/audience union. Shakespeare presents two opposing views in order to show that the collaborative relationship between the playwright and audience entails a delicate balance, and when the scales tip to one side or the other a ridiculous

performance, such as *Pyramus and Thisbe*, ensues. In addition, this scene also further constructs Shakespeare's ideal audience. Shakespeare subtly invokes an audience that not only understands they are participants in a collaborative union, but also imagines a playwright and an audience who participates in such a way as to maintain a balance in this relationship. For Shakespeare, the playwright and the audience do their equal share in bringing the text to fruition. Eventually, this audience will help construct the play's comedic ending and carry comedy into the Mechanicals' almost tragic assumptions.

III

In his article, "Shakespeare as a Joke," Michael Dobson challenges our view of Shakespearean comedy: "the Shakespeare of popular culture is generally a good deal more joked against than joking, less witty in himself than the cause that wit is in others" (117). Though Dobson, a harsh critic of Shakespeare's comedic talents, questions whether Shakespearean comedy is comedy at all, he marvels at the Rude Mechanicals' production of *Pyramus and Thisbe*: "Regardless of the fate of the rest of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or of the rest of the Shakespeare canon, 'Pyramus and Thisbe' and its rehearsals have remained ever since Taylor's time the one chunk of Shakespeare almost guaranteed to get laughs . . ." (120). In this final section of our adventure into *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and collaboration, we will question how comedy is created in this timeless scene and explore how the fictional auditors invoke Shakespeare's ideal audience, a partner that knows how to create and negotiate the play's comedic intent. Furthermore, as the fictional auditors turn what could be a misguided production of

Pyramus and Thisbe into a triumphant performance, Shakespeare summons not only his model audience but also uniquely establishes his authority and identity.

I admit that I am neither the first nor the last to explore the connection between the play's audience and the Athenian auditors. In fact, many have correlated the actions of Theseus and his guests with the place of the audience in the theater. However, we have yet to approach this relationship as a collaborative union. For example, Alvin Kernan, after examining five of Shakespeare's plays-within-plays (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Hamlet*, and *The Tempest*) concludes that "in his various presentations of stage audiences Shakespeare was obviously trying to instruct his actual audiences in the part they finally had to play in making his plays 'like an arch reverb' rate/the voice again'" (150). Stressing the word "instruct," Kernan devises a Shakespearean Do and Do Not list for Shakespeare's contemporary theatergoers:

By looking at images of themselves on the stage, he seems to have thought, an audience could become self-conscious about its own role in making theater work and learn the importance of simple good theatrical manners: not talking while the performance is in progress, not sitting upon the stage and making sneering critical remarks on the actors, not breaching the circle of theatrical illusion, and, more positively, piecing out the crudities of spectacle or performance with imagination and supporting it with sympathetic understanding of the actors' desire to please. (150)

In this part of his theory, Kernan acknowledges that a relationship exists between the playwright and playgoer and even asserts that the audience plays a role in this union.

However, according to Kernan, the fictional auditors and by association the theatergoers

normally play an obtrusive role to the performance. The fictional auditors then prompt the theatergoers to act differently and to give their support to the actors. In addition, Kernan reiterates his claim through an examination of Theseus as a negative example:

But Shakespeare went far beyond these mild, and usually humorous, remonstrances, for his stage audiences, taken in total, are designed to make a real audience at least consider, usually by means of negative example, the proper way to approach and conceive of a play. To take it too literally, to take it for reality, like Sly, Bottom, Caliban and even to some extent Hamlet, is to miss the real point and to interfere, as these audiences always do, with the effectiveness of the performance. To be too skeptical, however, like the prince of Navarre, Theseus, or Sebastian and Antonio, and not to allow the play even the status of temporary illusion, is equally destructive. Too much disbelief breaks off Shakespeare's internal plays as frequently as too much belief. (150)

I agree with Kernan that Shakespeare may be using his auditors to give manner lessons to his more boisterous spectators; Shakespeare's contemporary theatergoers were often unruly. In addition, I support Kernan's claim that Shakespeare "thought an audience could become self-conscious of its own role" (150). However, here is where the similarities end. Kernan's comments limit the audience's participation to a supporting role, "piecing out the crudities of spectacle of the performance with imagination and supporting it with sympathetic understanding of the actors' desire to please" (150), rather than stressing the audience's collaborative relationship with the playwright. Kernan gives all the power and authority to the writer, insinuating that the audience has little if anything to offer to the performance. Furthermore, Kernan's discussion does not take into account how the fictional auditors invoke Shakespeare's ideal and future audiences. However, unpacking Theseus' thoughts about the Rude Mechanicals' performance

represent the Duke as a constructive partner in the plays production. Theseus' initial intent and his following comments stand as an example of Shakespeare's view of the collaborative playwright/audience relationship, and invokes Shakespeare's ideal, active, and skilled partners.

After Theseus chooses *Pyramus and Thisbe* as the evening's performance, both Egeus and Hippolyta attempt to discourage Theseus' decision. In this brief conversation, Egeus emphasizes audience participation, and Theseus describes a constructive interaction between the stage and theatergoers.⁸ Egeus, who already has seen the Rude Mechanicals' play, tells the Duke it will not be appropriate for the evening's festivities:

It is not for you. I have heard it over,
And it is nothing, nothing in the world,
Unless you can find sport in their intents
Extremely stretched, and conned with cruel pain
To do you service. (5.1.77-81)

Egeus' statement insists that the Rude Mechanicals have gone to great pains to concoct the play for the Duke ("to do you [Theseus] service"); however, their efforts have fallen short. Furthermore, Egeus believes that the only way the play will be successful is if Theseus makes it so, if the Duke "can find sport in their intents" (5.1.79). In other words, according to Egeus, Theseus will have to make fun of the production. Nevertheless, Egeus' comments also suggest that Theseus will have to participate in the play in order to make it worthy of performance. Egeus introduces a connection between the fictional

auditors and the stage; however, as the conversation progresses, Shakespeare specifies how Theseus constructively collaborates with the performance.

After Theseus declares that he will hear the play—"I will hear that play;/ For never anything can be amiss/ When simpleness and duty tender it" (5.1.81-83)—Hippolyta joins in the conversation, attempting to alter Theseus' decision. Hippolyta objects because she thinks Theseus only wants to see the play so that he can watch the lower class toil, working extremely hard to please the Duke only to falter: "I love not to see wretchedness o'ercharged,/ And duty in his service perishing" (5.1.85-86), she states. However, Theseus quickly subdues her objection and declares that not only will he see the play but will constructively participate in the performance rather than simply observe "wretchedness o'ercharged," a sharp contrast to Egeus' initial suggestion and to Hippolyta's objection:

THESEUS: Why, gentle sweet, you shall see no such thing.
 HIPPOLYTA: He says they can do nothing in this kind.
 THESEUS: The kinder we, to give them thanks for nothing.
 Our sport shall be to take what they mistake,
 And what poor duty cannot do,
 Noble respect takes it in might, not merit.
 Where I have come, great clerks have purposed
 To greet me with premeditated welcomes,
 Where I have seen them shiver and look pale,
 Make periods in the midst of sentences,
 Throttle their practiced accent in their fears,
 And in conclusion dumbly have broke off,
 Not paying me a welcome. Trust me, sweet,
 Out of this silence yet I picked a welcome,
 And in the modesty of fearful duty
 I read as much as from the rattling tongue
 Of saucy and audacious eloquence.
 Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity
 In least speak most, to my capacity. (5.1.89-105)

Theseus' response has several layers: he not only proclaims that he will interact with the performance, "kinder we . . . our sport shall be to take what they mistake/ And what poor duty cannot do/ noble respect takes it in might, not merit," but also Theseus includes a personal example to highlight the intent of his participation. He previously met "great clerks" who had practiced giving him welcome. However, the men were so afraid of the Duke that they forgot to receive him. Instead of finding fault in this failure, Theseus discovered their greeting in their "modesty of fearful duty," as he proposes to do when he makes "sport" during the Rude Mechanicals' production. Theseus' response exemplifies his wish to constructively participate, to collaborate with the Rude Mechanicals' production when necessary. Through this example, Shakespeare highlights collaboration and, once again, reiterates that this union, from his perspective, requires a purposeful and constructive partnership. Furthermore, whatever the Rude Mechanicals present on the stage, the playwrights text, will intermingle with what the audience brings to the stage. Moreover, this scene begins to introduce Shakespeare's larger purpose for the audience; Shakespeare imagines theatergoers that will skillfully participate in the play's comedic intent, turning the performance into a "guarant(ee) to get laughs" (Dobson 120).

In a later statement, Theseus again reinforces his perspective of audience participation and collaboration. After Snout the joiner finishes his part as Wall, Hippolyta, who was previously sympathetic to the Rude Mechanicals and is now impatient with their production, turns to Theseus and declares that she finds the play absurd.

HIPPOLYTA: This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard.

THESEUS: The best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse if imagination amend them.

HIPPOLYTA: It must be your imagination, then, and not theirs.

THESEUS: If we imagine no worse of them than they of themselves, they may pass for excellent men. (5.1.207-212)

While Hippolyta does not find enjoyment in watching the mechanicals falter—their tragic performance is not so tragic—Theseus claims it is up to her to make the on-stage antics of the Rude Mechanicals into a performance worthy of note: “The best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse if imagination amend them.” Once again promoting purposeful interaction between the stage and the theatergoers, Theseus’ response discourages audience passivity; Hippolyta needs to “amend” the performance rather than just watch or support the movements on the stage. She needs to see beyond and into *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Moreover, Theseus not only encourages audience participation, but he also specifies the audience’s constructive part in the performance.

Instead of supporting the misguided tragedy, Theseus suggests that he will co-create the comedy in *Pyramus and Thisbe* and by association *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The Rude Mechanicals production is a failure as a tragedy; however, it is a triumph as a comedy. While the Rude Mechanicals believe they are presenting a tragic story, the fictional auditors recognize the acting troupe’s misconceptions of the audience—their silliness and the paradox between giving the audience too much and too little authority. After making this connection, Theseus encourages the Athenians, and by correlation the theatergoers, to “amend” the misguided performance. At this point, the Athenians and the audience have a choice: do they simply see the performance as

misguided, or do they bring the performance's humor into the spotlight? They choose the latter, helping transform the "fearful duty" into a comedic accomplishment. Theseus and his guests bring the Rude Mechanicals' mistaken perceptions of the audience and their overdramatic acting styles to the forefront, carrying comedy into the production rather than dismissing the performance. For example, Theseus and his guests humorously discuss Snug's prologue to the Lion's part:

SNUG [as Lion]: You, ladies, you whose gentle hearts do fear
 The smallest monstrous mouse that creeps on the floor,
 May now perchance both quake and tremble here
 When lion rough in wildest rage doth roar.
 Then know that I as Snug the joiner am
 A lion fell, nor else no lion's dam.
 For if I should as Lion come in strife
 Into this place, 'twere pity on my life.
 THESEUS: A very gentle beast, and of a good conscience.
 DEMETRIUS: The very best at a beast, my lord, that e'er I saw.
 LYSANDER: This lion is a very fox for his valour.
 THESEUS: True, and a goose for his discretion. (5.1.214-225)

Though we could read this scene as the Athenians just mocking the performance, Theseus actually helps emphasize the performance's better qualities, the play's humor. This action transforms the horrendous rendition of *Pyramus and Thisbe* into an accidental comedy. Through this scene, Shakespeare subtly informs his audience to do the same and invokes his ideal audience. Theseus serves as a manifestation of how Shakespeare envisions the collaborative relationship between the playwright and the audience operating; they are equal co-creators of the production.

While I have emphasized Theseus as Shakespeare's ideal collaborator, we must also not forget the Athenian lovers, the additional fictional auditors. Through Lysander, Hermia, Demetrius, and Helena, Shakespeare also approaches his relationship with the audience as a collaborative union. Although the lovers and, to a lesser extent Theseus, heckle and mock the Rude Mechanicals, they still help co-create the performance. Their input into *Pyramus and Thisbe* is just as important as the misguided production itself. However, the lovers co-create the performance unconsciously while Theseus intentionally helps construct the comedy. Theseus and his guests are equal partners in the production; however, ideally, at least for Shakespeare the audience would be aware of this collaborative union, hence his many discussions of the audience's active participation in the performance.

The Athenians' interactions with the performance mirror Louise Rosenblatt's discussion of the reader/writer/text collaborative relationship. For both Rosenblatt and Shakespeare the audience, writer, and performance interact in a "to-and-fro spiral":

In the past, reading has too often been thought of as an interaction, the printed page impressing its meaning on the reader's mind or the reader extracting the meaning embedded in the text. Actually, reading is a constructive, selective process over time in a particular context. The relations between the reader and the signs on the page proceed in a to-and-fro spiral, in which each is continually being affected by what the other has contributed. (26)

Though Rosenblatt focuses on the reader/text relationship, her theories apply to Shakespeare's production and depiction of collaboration. Theseus and his guests constructively contribute to the text, and the performance is "constantly being affected

by” the Duke’s interactions. It is this “spiral” that brings the play to fruition. Through his imagined audience, Shakespeare depicts the collaborative partnership Rosenblatt describes.

Throughout *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Shakespeare not only defines his view of collaboration but also invokes his ideal audience, establishing his identity. For Shakespeare as well as for other Early Modern playwrights such as Ben Jonson and Francis Beaumont collaboration and identity are intricately connected. However, Shakespeare uniquely establishes his identity by not only invoking his model audience but also by envisioning that audience as dynamic and skilled co-creators of the production. Depicting the playwright/audience union through Hermia and through the play-within-a-play allows Shakespeare to portray the relationship as an intimate partnership and to conjure an audience that fits his perception of this union; his ideal audience plays an equal part in the production, a partner to Shakespeare’s script. This invocation, as we shall see in the following chapters, promotes Shakespeare’s uniqueness. Unlike Jonson, who also envisions a collaborative relationship between the audience and the playwright, and who then invokes gullible spectators who are susceptible to con men and Lovewit, Shakespeare establishes his distinct identity through encouraging the audience to consciously collaborate. Furthermore, in contrast to Jonson, as we shall see, Shakespeare accomplishes this maneuver without drawing attention to himself as playwright. He constructs his authority and identity without blatantly making a bid for either. Though he does supply possible playwright figures or, at least, characters we could associate with the position of a writer—Peter Quince, Egeus, and Lysander—

Shakespeare does not endorse their perception of the audience, suggesting that he does not provide a replica of how he operates. Shakespeare, in his silence and, perhaps, absence, creates his authority and identity.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, we have exchanged the Early Modern prologue's often boisterous comments about collaboration and about authority for more subtle nods to the audience's ability to co-create the performance. In addition, we have also delved deeper into the concept of imagined audiences and the purpose of fictional auditors in a play-within-a-play, expanding our definition of audience. Furthermore, while Shakespeare's play explores collaboration and invokes his model spectators, it also introduces our next imagined audience: the actors. Puck makes this correlation as he watches the Rude Mechanicals practice in the Athenian forest. "I'll be an auditor—an actor, too, perhaps if I see cause" (3.1.67-68). In the following chapter, we will explore representations of the audience, and particularly actors as audience, in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*.

¹ These are the exact words from the film. The director and screenwriter Michael Hoffman has deleted lines 9-12 of the epilogue.

² For an examination of stage productions, see *Our Moonlight Revels*, and for a discussion of the play's initial performance and its myths see Alexander Leggatt and Paul Siegel.

³ All quotations for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and other Shakespearean works come from *The Norton Shakespeare*.

⁴ Though I use Sunhee Gertz's discussion as an example of how we usually read Egeus' speech, Gertz and I have some views in common. While Gertz does not use the term collaboration in her argument, she, at times, discusses "author-audience relations" and the intersections of the audience and author's imaginations (156). However, Gertz ultimately examines *A Midsummer Night's Dream* "to argue that Shakespeare presents these tensions between what we call dramatic and performance text as critical. More specifically, Shakespeare metaliterarily explores, from the perspective of authorship, how such tensions generate meaning" (153). In other words, Gertz explores literary traditions through subsections focused on persuasion, puns, metaphor, imagination, and the literary stage to show the connections or "tensions" between the script and the performance and how these "tensions" create meaning (153).

⁵ The correlation between Egeus, a father in a comedy, and Brabantio, a father in a tragedy, begs for further exploration into the repeated devices of opposing dramatic

genres and the outcomes these connections create. However, at this juncture, such a discussion would distract us from our journey.

⁶ Similarly, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the Ghost of Hamlet tells his son that Claudius bewitched Gertrude:

Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts—
O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
So to seduce!—won to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen. (1.5.42-46).

⁷ In fact, Shakespeare performs a similar, though more apparent appeal, in the opening of *Henry V*, when the Chorus acknowledges the audience's authority in the performance.

⁸ Since I am using *The Norton Shakespeare*, Egeus is Egeus in this scene instead of Philostrate. *The Norton Shakespeare* is constructed from the Oxford edition of Shakespeare's works. See the preface pages xi-xiv for specifics.

CHAPTER III

CON MEN AND CUSTOMERS: EXAMINING THE COLLABORATIVE AUDIENCES IN BEN JONSON'S *THE ALCHEMIST*

Charles Crichton's 1988 film *A Fish Called Wanda* begins with a scheme and a jewel heist. Jamie Lee Curtis (Wanda) and her accomplices, Michael Palin (a stuttering singleton who owns a fish called Wanda) and Kevin Kline (an overzealous American who is secretly having an affair with Wanda (not the fish)) steal thousands of pounds in diamonds and attempt to frame each other for the crime. Eventually, John Cleese, a British barrister enters the plot and falls in love with Wanda (still not the fish). After Kline consumes a course of fish tank sushi, eating Wanda, and taunts Cleese about his Britishness, Curtis and Cleese run away together to live happily ever after. Palin is left behind, but without his stutter, and Kline moves to South Africa to become a Minister of Justice.

Throughout this comedy, its adventures with old women and their small dogs as well as its lessons in Russian and Italian, the main characters are skilled thieves and actors. Curtis, Kline, and Palin are burglars as well as players, taking on the roles of a British law student and her brother, a courtroom spectator, a CIA agent, and a faithful girlfriend. They constantly change or improvise their parts in order to acquire the jewels. While this correlation between thieves and actors produced a hilarious film, it is neither

the first nor the last production to employ this particular element of anarchic schemes.

Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* also connects thieves, in this case con men, with actors; however, Jonson uses his depiction not only to create a comedy but also to examine and manipulate his collaborative relationship with the audience.

Though critics do not often approach actors as part of a play's intended audience, we, with little debate, can discuss players as the initial auditors for the script or play. In other words, players serve as part of the audience. Furthermore, while Early Modern playwrights depicted theatergoers from the stage, they included representations of actors as well. For example, *Hamlet*, *Volpone*, and even *A Midsummer Night's Dream* portray actors as spectators of the evening's performance. In this chapter, we will examine this particular "imagined audience" along with Ben Jonson's representation of theatergoers in his *The Alchemist*, a unique comedy that presents conning as acting and playwriting (Face, Subtle, and Dol attempt to swindle money from the Londoners through fake alchemy) and gullible customers as theatergoers (Dapper, Drugger, and Mammon are all too willing to be conned). I examine this frolic through the world of alchemy to assert that *The Alchemist*, with its attention to theatergoing as well as its almost chemical link between acting, conning, auditing, and imagining, presents and examines multiple depictions of the collaborative relationship between the playwright and the audience. Jonson uses his enactments of this union to invoke his ideal audience. In addition, Jonson establishes his authority and identity through this invocation, not only conjuring his model audience but also envisioning his audience as unwitting collaborators. Both

Jonson's customers and con men are co-creators of the performance; however, they are unsuspectingly participating in and sometimes subjugated to the playwright's will.

In order to support my claims about collaboration, audience, and authority, I have divided this chapter into three parts. The first delves into Jonson's representation of con-artists as both actors and playwrights and his gullible customers as theatergoers, connecting Jonson's depiction to the history of the Early Modern stage and to the rise of the professional actor, in order for us to have a fuller understanding of Jonson's complicated comedy and intent. The second section examines the multiple layers of collaboration in *The Alchemist*: the representation of con men as actors/audience and the relationship between the con men and customers (playwrights and audience). The third turns to Jonson's manipulation of collaboration through Lovewit, the owner of the house in Blackfriars, emphasizing how Jonson perceives his playwright position as highly authoritative. This chapter further expands our definition of audience to include actors, moves us deeper into the Early Modern stage's "imagined audiences," and continues our examination of collaboration. Furthermore, *The Alchemist* serves as a bridge to the complicated plot structure and multi-layered representations of audience in Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*.

I

While other Early Modern plays, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Hamlet*, imagine actors as actual players—the Rude Mechanicals perform as players and an acting troupe arrives at Elsinore—*The Alchemist*'s first imagined audience appears

under the mask of con-artists. In the Norton introduction to *The Alchemist*, Katherine Eisaman Maus, after describing the connection between the “alchemical scam and a theatrical performance” links the con-artists Face, Subtle, and Dol, “the alchemist and his co-conspirators,” to “playwrights and actors” (864).¹ In other words, the con men in *The Alchemist* represent players and playwrights, and their prey represents theatergoers. This correlation expands our definition of audience to include players and theatergoers and emphasizes the history of the Early Modern stage and the rise of the professional player. Jonson’s play and his representation of con men as actors/audience and customers as theatergoers calls attention to this dramatic shift while also craftily correlating the con men and gulls to the playwright/audience relationship. Exploring these correlations both within the text and within theatrical history will guide us through Jonson’s examination of collaboration and invocation of his ideal audience.

The Alchemist starts with a discussion of values, harkening back to the Medieval morality play (particularly its view of the audience) and encompassing the history of professional actors. After appealing to the theatergoers, or as the Prologue states “judging spectators,” for “justice” and “grace,” the Prologue highlights man’s and London’s vices in the hopes of improving the auditors’ moral judgments (Prol. 3-4):

Our scene is London, ‘cause we would make known
 No country’s mirth is better than our own.
 No clime breeds better matter for your whore,
 Bawd, squire, impostor, any persons more,
 Whose manners, now called humors, feed the stage,
 And which have still been subject for the rage
 Or spleen of comic writers. Though this pen
 Did never aim to grieve, but better, men,

Howe'er the age he lives in doth endure
The vices that she breeds above their cure. (Pro. 5-14)

The desire to improve man's ethics reflects the medieval morality play, where dramas depicted man's struggle with good and evil in the hopes that good would prevail and evil would perish. *The Alchemist* continues this tradition in its opening declaration that the play will better the morals of the theatergoers and its primary characters, as Ouellette describes: "The rogues (vice figures) of *The Alchemist* entice their gulls (assorted representations of Mankind) with temptations. In the end, the gulls are chastised as fools only to return to their previous affairs largely unscathed but hopefully wiser" (379).² These vice and gull figures mirror the morality play: Mammon's pride is a reflection of mankind's universal struggle with sin, and Subtle's constant insistence that he can change metal into gold represents temptation. Furthermore, if we envision the audience to include "the rogues," then they too will be "chastised" (Ouellette 379). These initial connections between *The Alchemist* and morality plays illustrate one of the ways Jonson's comedy links the performance to the audience: Jonson sets out to teach his audience a lesson about morality, and he envisions his audience as needing this particular tutorial.³ However, whether or not he accomplishes this goal is up for debate, as we shall see in section three.

In addition to the prologue's connection to medieval morality plays, the *Alchemist*'s main character, Face, has a link to the medieval acting guilds, precursors to the professional acting companies established in London, such as the King's Men who first performed *The Alchemist* at the Blackfriars theater in 1610. The professional actor

and acting troupe, as Judith Cook writes, “did not, of course, suddenly appear from nowhere once playhouses started being built. Plays had been regularly, if seasonally, performed since early medieval times by the various guilds.” Usually craftsmen, these local guilds performed mystery plays, such as *Everyman* and the York cycle (9). By designating “pynneres and painters” as the performers, the *York Crucifixion* literally captures this tradition (Happé 525).⁴ *The Alchemist* continues this custom, where players often held laborious occupations separate from their role in the performance. Face has two professions: he is not only a con-artist, but he is also a butler in Lovewit’s house, though Face’s employment as butler is all but forgotten until Lovewit’s arrival in Act Five. Nevertheless, Face, similar to the medieval craftsmen, maintains one job while also working another. In addition to Jonson’s connection between Face and the medieval guilds, the same tradition also appears in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Snug the joiner and Bottom the weaver, along with the rest of the Rude Mechanicals, are amateur actors: craftsmen by day, actors when necessary. These subtle connections pay tribute to the history of the professional actor.

The Alchemist’s connection with the history of the players does not stop with the medieval period. The mystery guilds transformed into traveling groups of players, moving even closer to the creation of professional acting troupes.

By the time Elizabeth came to the throne, bands of players along with tumblers and musicians were traveling around the countryside playing in the towns and villages, especially at fairs and on public holidays, offering drama which was pure entertainment. (Cook 10)

These players met with opposition, as most theaters and players of the period did, and eventually some turned to the patronage system, as Cooke describes:

Actors were suddenly in demand as it became the fashion for a lord or earl to have his own company of players as part of the household. Their patrons' desire to advertise their wealth and success thus enabled the actors to perform legally and without fear of the consequence, so long as they were officially known by the name of their patron as, for example, the Earl of Leicester's Men.

Under the auspices of a powerful patron, players were able to continue touring so long as they were available to perform for him whenever they were required to do so . . . (11)

While this new system allowed actors to continue their craft, it also made them servants to their patron, performing as the earl commanded, and helped maintain their nomadic life. When these actors were not in service to their patron, they, once again, traveled for profit; however, now they ventured with the knowledge that they could be summoned at any time.⁵ Furthermore, as the Vagabonds Act illustrates, additional groups continued to tour without support from the nobles, producing two types of traveling actors: those with permission and those without. In both instances and even with the safety of their new patrons, actors did not have their own enterprise or theaters, either answering to their patrons or to the legal system. This particular method remained until the 1572 Vagabonds Act, an act Andrew Gurr describes as the “chief statute that the government employed to control players” (*Shakespearean Playing Companies* 26).

The Vagabonds Act characterized any patronless wandering troupe—actors, jugglers, fencers, and the like—as criminals, illegal “Roges, Vacaboundes and Sturdy Beggars” (Gurr: *Shakespearean Stage* 28).⁶ In order for the troupes to be legal, they had

to have the support of a nobleman or of a dignitary. While this act was meant to eliminate roaming players and to lessen the popularity of the troupes, it did not accomplish its purpose, as Andrew Gurr observes in his *Shakespearean Stage*:

The “Acte for the punishment of Vacabondes” of 1572 served the companies of players much as it was designed to serve the commonwealth of England as a whole. It authorized the better members of the profession to pursue their trade and turned the idle and poor members to higher things. (28)

Furthermore, “it was an early step in the progress of the professional players from strolling entertainers, who never performed in the same place twice running, to permanently established repertory companies” (28). In other words, instead of eliminating or at least diminishing the acting troupes, players began to take steps towards permanent venues. Only four years after the Vagabonds Act, James Burbage built the first playhouse in London, The Theatre, in 1576. The Curtain followed shortly thereafter, and Philip Henslowe’s The Rose after that in approximately 1588. Upon the completion of several other playhouses, including the Globe and the Swan, players began to hold shares in their companies: “at least four of the actors with the King’s Men (Richard Burbage, Shakespeare, Heminge, and Condell) held shares in their own company” (Cairns 35). In addition, some players, particularly Shakespeare, held a dual position in the theater, both writing and performing. The ability to hold shares in an acting company pin points the thriving theatrical market and the transformation from roaming players to established businessmen and playwrights. Gurr best describes this flourishing London market: “London offered the two essentials of success, financial backing and a permanent

playing-place. The honey was in London, and the bees proved tenacious in clinging to it” (*The Shakespearean Stage* 29). As acting became a profitable adventure, players could make a living from their craft and no longer had to travel the countryside to perform. Nevertheless, even with their newly acquired status and theaters, they often retained a patron: the Lord Admiral’s Men, The King’s Men, the Children of the Queen’s Revel’s for example.

Jonson’s depiction of con-artists as players and playwrights echoes both the creation of professional acting troupes and the Vagabonds Act. When the play begins, Face and Subtle are in the middle of a violent argument; Face holds a sword, and Subtle jostles a bottle of acid. As Doll attempts to separate and calm the two men, Face and Subtle debate who has created whom: who is the leader of the “venture tripartite” (1.1.135)? During their continuous stream of insults—at one point Subtle screams “I fart at thee” (1.1.2), and, in another moment, Face recalls how Subtle used to “walk piteously costive” (1.1.27-28)—we learn that Face, Doll, and Subtle have been “cozening” Londoners with the promise of turning metal into gold, an illegal action. This scene introduces not only a group of con-artists but also a troupe of players.

The resemblance between Jonson’s group of criminals and the professional acting company appears in the label “venture tripartite” (1.1.135). As Jonathon Haynes, with the assistance of R.L Smallwood, explains, arguing for “a new conception of criminality” in *The Alchemist*, the con-artists work like a full fledged London acting company:

The “Argument” makes the “tripartite indenture” sound something like shares in an acting company—“they here contract,/ Each for a share, and all begin to act.” (7-8) R. L Smallwood points out that their enterprise “masquerades as a fully

constituted trading house', with 'credit' to be maintained, as a 'venture tripartite' based upon an 'indenture' uniting its members." It looks like a joint stock company, the newest form of capitalist organization.⁷ (33)

The connection between Face, Doll, and Subtle and an acting troupe is also embedded in their location. This particular acting troupe has acquired their own London venue, Lovewit's home, and is conducting their performances in this space. Moreover, as if the connection between Jonson's con-artists and acting troupes is not already apparent, Lovewit's home is also located in Blackfriars. While explaining how *The Alchemist* examines the adult private playhouse, Ouellette makes this connection clear: "Indeed, the play presents a series of parallel and yet increasingly defined sets of real and theatrical spaces. Lovewit's house is not only within the Blackfriars district but *is* the Blackfriars playhouse and even more specifically the stage upon which the play is performed" (381). Furthermore, Lovewit, the owner of the "stage" reinforces the patronage system, though not the nomadic life actors previously assumed. At the end of the performance, the "venture tripartite" could easily be called "Lovewit's Men." In addition, though Face, Doll, and Subtle do not travel through the countryside like "Roges, Vacaboundes and Sturdy Beggars" (Gurr: *Shakespearean Stage* 28), they still maintain the criminal element, conning gullible and greedy customers out of their silver and wits.⁸ Their actions closely resemble the unflattering description of players in the Vagabonds Act while also incorporating the burgeoning theatrical enterprise in London.

Now that we understand Jonson's elaborate depictions of con-artists as players and playwrights, we will delve into how this representation introduces and examines

multiple layers of collaboration. In *The Alchemist*, Jonson analyzes the collaborative bond between the con men as playwrights and their theatergoers (Mammon, Dapper, Druggier, Tribulation, and Surly), as well as the audience (actors and theatergoers) and the playwright (Jonson and his representation Lovewit). From this perspective, I illustrate how the players and theatergoers co-create the plot of the performance and how Jonson uses these representations to invoke an unwitting yet collaborative audience and his own authority.

II

As Doll attempts to diffuse Face and Subtle's opening argument, the butler and the alchemist decide they will play a little game: who can con the best? Face turns to Subtle, "'Slid, prove today who shall shark best,'" and Subtle agrees (1.1.160). The pact between Face and Subtle will allow the men to work, once again, together, but also to work separately, using their initial scheme of alchemy, in which Face serves as an assistant to the alchemist, Subtle, as a ploy, so that the men may individually see who is superior: the better artist will work within this framework the best. The contest between Face and Subtle serves as the axis for our discussion of collaboration because it orchestrates how the con men, as both actors and players (audience) will perform for the rest of *The Alchemist*. As James Van Dyke explains, attempting to use what he calls "the game of wits" to break down the "homogenization of the knavish characters" (253), "This game acts as a rudder, steering the main action and influencing the course of *dialogue* and *incident*" (emphasis added 255). As audience members, Face and Company will

create part of the production, improvising much of the performance, and as playwrights they will use the scenarios that their customers bring to the alchemist to sway the audience, resembling the playwright's bid for authority in the prologue to *The Roaring Girl*. This maneuver moves towards Jonson's overall depiction and examination of collaboration.

Many critics, including Haynes and Van Dyke, have noted that the "venture tripartite" use improvisation—Haynes refers to their "free improvisation" in comparison to "specialized and routinized deception of cony-catching pamphlets" (32), and Van Dyke states that "*The Alchemist*, like *Volpone*'s mountebank scene, is full of sophisticated play-acting, largely improvised, though the three confederates have some customary roles and disguises and have the stage of Lovewit's house" (255). However, while these critics mention improvisation, highlighting the "venture tripartite's" main form of acting, they do not discuss the ramifications of this type of performance. The players' performances serve as a key element to Jonson's examination and use of collaboration. Since improvisation, by nature, includes composition, Face, Doll and Subtle (players and audience members) help create the performance.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the verb "improvise" means to "To compose (verse, music, etc.) on the spur of the moment; to utter or perform extempore" or "To compose, utter, or perform verse or music impromptu; to speak extemporaneously; hence, to do anything on the spur of the moment." When each of their customers arrives at Lovewit's home in Blackfriars, Face, Doll, and Subtle perform the textbook definition of "improvise." For example, almost as soon as Face and Subtle

agree to see who can “shark best,” their first opportunity arrives. While Face commends Doll, calling her “Doll Proper” (1.1.177), an unexpected visitor enters: “Who’s that?” Subtle hesitantly asks. “One rings. To the window, Doll!” he commands. “Pray heav’n/ The Master do not trouble us this quarter” (1.1.181-182). Instead of Lovewit at the door, Doll finds Dapper, a “lawyer’s clerk” who Face “lighted on last night/ In Holborn, at the Dagger” (1.1.190-192). Dapper has come to see if the alchemist can create a spirit for him “to rifle with at horses and win cups” (1.1.193); Dapper wants to cheat at games and win some money. “In the spur of the moment,” Face devises a plan: dressed as a captain, he will pretend to leave Lovewit’s home, and, in the process, accidentally meet Dapper at the door. Meanwhile, Subtle will change into his alchemist’s robes and prepare to swindle Dapper. In addition to this initial scheme, after Dapper proposes his request, Face constructs yet another impromptu plan. Face convinces Dapper that he is related to the Queen of Fairies in order to deceive Dapper out of more of his money. This pattern continues throughout the play, where customers arrive and the “venture tripartite” devise schemes “in the spur of the moment.” Face, upon Mammon’s entrance, changes into Lungs, the alchemist’s assistant, and composes a relationship between Mammon and Doll, who portrays “a lord’s sister” (2.3.222); Ananias and Tribulation are tricked into pursuing the philosophers’ stone further; Face and Subtle use Surly to teach Kastril to quarrel, and poor Dapper ends up eating gingerbread. Constantly creating these impromptu moments represents the con-artists (audience members) as co-creators, emphasizing that the audience composes, even extemporaneously and perhaps unsuspectingly, part of the performance. The audience brings their imaginations to the

comedy, and the play uses these skills to produce the production. However, as we shall see, the con-artists will eventually fall prey to the playwright and Lovewit. Though they help compose the performance, they do not control the intent or outcome of the comedy.

In addition to examining the “tripartite” from this perspective, we must also analyze Jonson’s other representations of audience, the customers/theatergoers, and the role the con men perform as playwrights. Jonson depicts multiple layers of collaboration, including unions between the customers and the playwrights (the con men) and between Jonson/Lovewit and his audience (the customers and con men). The tripartite’s first gulls bear similar characteristics: Dapper and Drugger come to the alchemist with simple requests and leave with further ambitions. When Subtle and Face con Dapper and their second customer, Drugger, they, as stated above, create an impromptu plot to accommodate Dapper’s, and in this case, Drugger’s arrivals and wishes—Dapper wants to cheat, and Drugger wants to know how to arrange his store in order to create the most profit. However, while Dapper arrives at the alchemist’s lair with the hope of gaining a spirit to aid in his gambling adventures, when Dapper leaves the alchemist’s laboratory, Face and Subtle have made him believe he is “allied to the Queen of Faery” (1.2.127). The con men have expanded Dapper’s meager desire to be a better gambler into a desire to meet the Queen, elevating Dapper from a common card player to the relative of royalty. In addition, Subtle suggests that Drugger, who initially asks for simple suggestions about the layout of his store, would be an excellent candidate for the philosophers’ stone (1.3.76-80). This trick, as Maus explains, shows Face and Subtle interacting with Dapper and Drugger’s imaginations:

Face and Subtle, working together, attempt to create for these two dullards the imaginations they do not possess, improving upon their modest fantasy lives in order to extract more profit from their gullibility; for only if astounding success is prophesied them will they surrender the relative paltry amounts of money they already have on hand. (862)

Though Maus perceives the costumers as “two dullards” whose “modest fantasy lives” could use some improvement, she describes Face and Subtle (playwrights) altering Dapper and Drugger’s initial requests to create a scheme to “extract more profit” from the two unimaginative men (862). Within this collaborative relationship the playwrights are taking what the audience brings to the performance and working with it to gain more profit, a maneuver that parallels Jonson and Lovewit’s performance at the end of the production. In addition, further exploring this connection in the relationship between Face, Doll, and Subtle and their other customers, such as Epicure Mammon, uncovers additional and similar manipulative moments. As this collaborative union evolves it begins to vary considerably from the unions in both Shakespeare and Beaumont.

When Face and Subtle interact with Drugger and Dapper, they attempt to alter their imaginations in the same way in which *The Roaring Girl* works with the theatergoers’ images of an unruly woman. As discussed in the first chapter, in the example of the prologue to *The Roaring Girl*, theatergoers come to the playhouse with expectations and preconceived notions that influence the way they perceive the play and the way they help construct the performance. In *The Roaring Girl*, the playgoers bring mental representations of boisterous women:

Each one comes
 And brings a play in's head with him: up he sums
 What he would of a roaring girl have writ;
 If that he finds not here, he mews at it. (Pro. 3-7)

The prologue describes a difficult position for both the stage and the playgoers: if the on-stage presentation differs from the theatergoers' mental pictures, then they will disapprove of the performance, and in order for the stage to present a portrait of Mad Moll, the stage must work with and sometimes against the playgoer's preconceived views. Realizing the delicacy of the situation, the prologue to the *Roaring Girl* performs a tricky rhetorical maneuver. The prologue promises a new roaring girl, "(whose notes till now never were)/ shall fill with laughter our vast theater" (Pro. 9-10), and lists the images of boisterous women the theatergoers probably imagine (Pro. 16-20). By acknowledging possible images and promising a new and improved version, the performance attempts to build upon and manipulate the descriptions the playgoers bring with them in order to create Mad Moll and acknowledges issues of authority inherent in a collaborative relationship. The union between the customers and the "venture tripartite" works in much the same way; however, Jonson portrays multiple layers of collaboration within the play's five acts and varying representations of customers.

While creating new images and imaginations for Dapper and Drugger appears as a simple task—they easily fall for the new requests that Face and Subtle create—the other customers in *The Alchemist* are much harder to entice, representing additional collaborative ingenuity and enhancing the rhetorical maneuvers in *The Roaring Girl*. The third customer, Mammon, arrives with almost too much imagination; he has previously

requested the philosophers' stone and has spent many hours imagining what he can do with it:

I shall have all my beds blown up, not stuffed;
Down is too hard. And then, mine oval room
Filled with such pictures as Tiberius took
From Elephantis, and dull Aretine
But coldly imitated. Then my glasses
Cut in more subtle angles, to disperse
And multiply the figures as I walk
Naked between my succubae. (2.2.41-48)

Mammon continues to envision how he will spend his time and his gold for most of Act Two, Scene Two. Conning Mammon further than Mammon's initial request of the philosophers' stone requires the "venture tripartite" to embellish Mammon's overactive imagination—in comparison to the theatergoers imagined in *The Roaring Girl*, Mammon's images of an unruly woman would be astronomical—and to collaborate with Mammon's thoughts. Building upon Mammon's attraction to women, Face and Subtle create a scheme in which Doll plays "a lord's sister" who has gone mad and who has come to the alchemist for a cure (2.3.222). Mammon becomes enraptured with Doll and insists that he meet her. Face, now dressed as Lungs, the alchemist's assistant, refuses the request: "I dare not, in good faith" he states (2.3.251). "He's [the alchemist is] extreme angry that you saw her, sir" he declares (2.3.252). Only when Mammon has given more money or "drink" does Face agree to tell Mammon more about Doll and to allow Mammon to see her in private (2.3.253). When the two finally meet in Act Four, Face gives Doll instructions to "suckle him" or to take as much of his money as possible

(4.1.32).⁹ This arrangement and individualized attention allows the con-artists to collaborate with and manipulate Mammon's initial request. Though the "tripartite" work harder to fool Mammon, the method is very similar to the methods they used on both Dapper and Drugger and are an extension of the rhetorical maneuver in *The Roaring Girl*.

In addition to the unimaginative Dapper and Drugger and the ambitious Mammon, *The Alchemist* presents a third type of customer, Pertinax Surly. Similar to the other customers, Surly comes to the alchemist with a particular intent; however, unlike Dapper, Drugger, and Mammon, Surly arrives with reservations against alchemy and a goal to prove that alchemy is a scam; he is prepared to "mew" at the performance (*The Roaring Girl* Pro. 7). When Surly initially appears, he accompanies his friend Mammon, who has come to see when the philosophers' stone will be ready. As Mammon attempts to convince Surly of not only the plausibility of the philosophers' stone but also of its incredible powers, Surly declares that he will believe it when he sees it:

Yes, when I see't I will.
But if my eyes do cozen me so, and I
Giving 'em no occasion, sure I'll have
A whore shall piss 'em out next day. (2.1.42-45)¹⁰

Surly's comments declare his mental image of alchemy: he sees alchemy as a deception, and he believes the philosophers' stone is silly nonsense. With this image in his mind, Surly sets out to discover the scam, believing that the house in Blackfriars not only deals in alchemy but also in prostitutes: "Now I am sure it is a bawdy house;/ I'll swear it, were

the marshal here to thank me” (2.3.298-299). Though Surly brings skepticism and doubt to the alchemist’s, he still resembles the other customers. He arrives with a preconceived perception of what he wants to see (he wants to see the conning foiled), and to keep Surly from destroying their plots Face, Subtle, and Doll must work with and challenge these unflattering, though true, images.

Furthermore, the “tripartite” collaborate with Surly’s scheme to reveal their deceptions in order to con the other customers. To keep Surly from convincing Dame Pliant that Face and Subtle are frauds, Subtle uses Surly’s plot to reveal the deception. Surly, dressed as a Spanish Don, “bumps” into Face on the streets and wishes to discuss some business with the alchemist; Surly, then, later arrives at the alchemist’s, still dressed as a Spanish Don, and escorts Dame Pliant into the garden. He tells her about Face and Subtle’s scams and asks her to let him deal with “these household rogues” (4.6.16). When Subtle enters the garden, Surly reveals himself. Subtle cries, “Help, murder!” (4.6.29), and Face convinces Kastril, Dame Pliant’s brother, that Surly (disguised as a Don) intended to steal his sister from the real Spanish ambassador who has been detained. Surly leaves the scene, but he eventually returns with Mammon in Act Five, where the two men knock on the alchemist’s door only to find that the scam is over. Though Surly depicts an unbelieving customer—he does not trust in alchemy—the “tripartite” still compete and collaborate with his images. They use and alter his views and collaborate with his scheme in order to create and maintain the performance. This representation of a theatergoer, one that appears skeptical of the performance from the beginning, is not unusual. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* presents similar characters in

the grocer, George, and his wife, Nell. Representing these types of characters from the stage, *The Alchemist*, and as we shall see later in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, imagine and incorporate many representations of audience. Nevertheless, these plays view each one as a collaborator.

Jonson through his con men as playwrights works with the imaginations of his audience (actors and theatergoers), depicting a collaborative relationship between the playwright and his audience. However, Jonson's primary focus is on where authority lies in this union. He invokes an audience who is an unwitting participant in Jonson's overall scheme. This maneuver creates Jonson's authority and identity, distinguishing him from Shakespeare and Beaumont. We witness the exploitative though collaborative relationship between the playwright and his audience that Jonson imagines not only in the depiction of the "tripartite" and their customers but also in the representation of the audience (con men and customers) and their encounter with Lovewit. Here the con men, who were previously manipulative playwrights, and their customers become unsuspecting prey to Jonson's paradoxical plan to moralize the audience and steal their money.

III

As we observed in the previous section, one of the ways Jonson invokes his ideal audience, a group of gullible and unsuspecting auditors, occurs through the "venture tripartite's" alchemical scam. However, Jonson uses other subtle moments to reinforce his view of the playwright/audience collaborative relationship. In the opening moments

of the performance, Jonson emphasizes his position as playwright, and negotiates the position of the audience:

Fortune, that favors fools, these two short hours
 We wish away, both for your sakes and ours,
 Judging spectators, and desire in place
 To th'author justice, to ourselves but grace. (Pro. 1-4)

While wishing away Fortune for the duration of the performance, the prologue both flatters and insults the playgoers. Jonson imagines the playgoers as “judging spectators,” insinuating that the playgoers have the capacity to judge the play for themselves and also reiterating the theatergoers’ relationship with the playwright. The performance has little substance without the validation and presence of the playgoers. However, at the same time, the prologue tells the theatergoers what they should think. They should grant “justice” to the author, Ben Jonson, and “grace” to the players. The prologue seems to address the theatergoers’ authority, but the prologue never fully allows the playgoers to judge. Furthermore, Jonson, the creator of this manipulation, judges the spectators. Since the prologue has to tell the theatergoers how to critique the play, Jonson determines that the theatergoers are fools and that he must make the decision for them. This maneuver elevates Jonson’s control over the performance and subjugates the theatergoers’ participation in the play. Jonson, though he makes a subtle comment, nevertheless still attempts to use the prologue as a tactic to wield *his* authority in the collaborative relationship. He draws attention to himself as playwright, an approach

absent from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*.

Jonson's prologue also introduces, as previously discussed, his intent for the comedy and his authority over its outcome. The prologue lists London's vices—London “breeds better matter for your whore” than any other city (Pro. 7)—and states that Jonson will improve the audience's moral values. Jonson sets out to “better” his audience. Similar to Jonson's comments about “judging spectators,” this moralizing sentiment calls attention to Jonson's position as playwright and elevates him over his collaborators. He has the capacity and knowledge to instill values on his sinful audience. Once again, though Jonson approaches his audience as collaborators, he envisions a hierarchy within this union.

In addition to his subtle bids for authority in the prologue, Jonson's dominant nod to his authority appears in Act Five, the arrival of Lovewit. Lovewit, Face's “master,” the owner of the house in Blackfriars, and a representation of Jonson himself, moved to the country to escape the plague (1.1.49). In his absence, his butler, Face/Jeremy, turned his home into an alchemical lab in order to con local Londoners. When Lovewit returns to his estate, he saves Face from his own inventions and fulfills Jonson's promise to provide a moral lesson and to “better” the audience. As Face's scams begin to catch up with him—he is fighting with Subtle over who will get Dame Pliant, and Surly has vowed to return with Mammon to bring justice to the house—Doll declares that Lovewit is at the door. “Forty o'the neighbors are about him, talking,” she states (4.7.13).

Lovewit listens to his neighbors' gossip: many men and carriages have come to the house. Lovewit imagines what attraction would produce such a crowd:

What device should he bring forth now?
 I love a teeming wit as I love my nourishment.
 Pray God he ha' not kept such open house
 That he hath sold my hangings and my bedding!
 I left him nothing else. If he have eat 'em,
 A plague o'the moth, say I. Sure he has got
 Some bawdy pictures to call all this ging:
 The Friar and the Nun, or the new motion
 Of the knight's courser covering the parson's mare,
 The boy of six year old with the great thing,
 Or't may be he has the fleas that run at tilt
 Upon a table, or some dog at dance? (5.1.16-27)

Lovewit, who literally loves wit, thinks that Face has some "bawdy pictures" in the house and that these images are attracting the crowd. However, after Lovewit knocks on the door several times, Face answers, encountering the neighbors, Surly, and Mammon. While Lovewit tries to figure out his butler's new occupation, Face's predicament increases. Surly wants to expose the "venture tripartite," and Dapper, who has eaten through his gingerbread, screams in the background. Kastriel, Ananias, and Tribulation also arrive to rail at Face. In order to save himself, Face requires Lovewit's assistance, and in turn, Lovewit puts an end to Face's and hence the audience's prominent immoral practices.

After Lovewit marries Dame Pliant, fulfilling Face's promise to her brother Kastriel, Doll and Subtle flee and Lovewit assures the officers that "Face" is not in the house. Jeremy, formerly Face, reiterates Face's absence and the play comes to a close.

In his final lines, Lovewit proclaims that he has indulged his butler's wit, but he has also instilled honor in Jeremy and by correlation the audience.

That master
 That had received such happiness by a servant,
 In such a widow, and with so much wealth,
 Were very ungrateful if he would not be
 A little indulgent to that servant's wit,
 And help his fortune, though with some small strain
 Of his own candor. [To the audience] Therefore, gentlemen
 And kind spectators, if I have outstripped
 An old man's gravity or strict canon, think
 What a young wife and a good brain may do:
 Stretch age's truth sometimes, and crack it too.—
 Speak for thyself, knave. (5.5.146-157)

Lovewit's final speech makes the connection between Lovewit and Jonson prominent. Lovewit represents Jonson because not only does Lovewit love wit, but also he fulfills what Jonson set out to do: convey morals to his immoral audience. In addition to emphasizing Lovewit's moral judgment over the audience, Jonson also insists on his authority and a hierarchy within the collaborative relationship through how he envisions the morals he hopes to instill. Instead of finding Face's schemes immediately sinful, Lovewit first participates in the scam for his own gain. He marries a young widow. Lovewit's actions go against what the audience would normally consider moral, as Lovewit reiterates:

Therefore, gentlemen
 And kind spectators, if I have outstripped
 An old man's gravity or strict canon, think

What a young wife and a good brain may do. (5.5.152-157)

Jonson's detour from the audience's usual principles and his attempt to instill these altered ethics in the audience emphasizes Jonson's authority. He can create and reiterate the morals he chooses. In addition, Lovewit's actions and his partnership with Face declare that victims of wit or victims of a witty playwright deserve their punishments. Perhaps, this is the ultimate wisdom or moral Jonson hopes to instill in his audience. In fact, Face emphasizes this claim at the end of the performance.

After Dame Pliant and her brother Kastril leave the stage, Lovewit tells Face to "speak for thyself, knave" (5.5.157), and Face gives the epilogue:

So I will, sir—Gentlemen,
My part a little fell in this last scene,
Yet 'twas decorum. And though I am clean
Got off from Subtle, Surly, Mammon, Doll,
Hot Ananias, Dapper, and Drugger, all
With whom I traded, yet I put myself
On you, that are my country; and this pelf
Which I have got, if you do quit me, rests
To feast you often, and invite new guests. (5.5.157-165)

Face's remarks depict the relationship between the stage and the theatergoers that has been reiterated throughout the performance. The theatergoers are customers, and the con men are players, performing for the theatergoer's "pelf": "The pelf which I have got" refers to the profits of the 'venture tripartite' but also, at the same time, to the theater receipts. Jeremy proposes, in other words, to bribe the audience with their own money, a

swindle worthy of the con man he was and is” (Maus 866). Face has tricked the theatergoers in much the same way Jonson has; Face leads the playgoers to believe they are guests at the performance instead of customers at a scheme. Connecting the play to the theater and discussing Mammon’s imagination, Maus makes a claim that encompasses Face’s closing sentiments and is applicable to the play in general: “In *The Alchemist*, Jonson makes the transaction between cheats and gulls seem close to the transaction between a theater company and the spectators who pay good money but get nothing more substantial in return than chimeras and fantasies” (865). In other words, the theatergoers, from Jonson’s perspective, are like the gulls in the performance, who are scammed out of their “pelf” and are given nothing. Furthermore, Jonson once again insinuates that the audience, if they fell victim to his wit, if they liked the play, then they deserve to be conned.

Though Jonson pays tribute to his own authority throughout the production, ultimately he still approaches his audience as collaborators. In order for a scam or a performance to occur, the playwright and the audience must work together. By drawing attention to both parts, even if Jonson sees one part as dominant and even if the audience plays an unflattering role as he depicts, Jonson asserts that the playwright and the audience are indispensable and that both are required in different capacities to create the performance. Furthermore, Jonson’s multi-layered examination of collaboration calls into question, similar to theorists such as LeFevre and Rosenblatt, how this relationship operates and how authority should be divided: how do the contributors interact? In addition, though Jonson sees his collaborators as gullible customers, he does not portray

this dynamic as problematic. In fact, for Jonson it is beneficial. In contrast to Shakespeare, we see the “to-and-fro spiral” between the writer and the audience that Rosenblatt describes between the text and the reader—“The relations between the reader and the signs on the page proceed in a to-and-fro spiral, in which each is continually being affected by what the other has contributed” (26)—but we do not see the spiral equally moving between the playwright and the audience. Nevertheless, we do witness an operational collaborative relationship between an authoritative playwright and his customers.

In *The Alchemist*, Jonson makes a bid for playwright authority that has yet to be seen in our discussions of prologues or midsummer festivities. Unlike Shakespeare, who uses his fictional auditors to represent a conscious partnership between the playwright and the audience while also subtly invoking his authority and identity, Jonson acknowledges collaboration and uses his imagined audiences, the con men and customers (players and playgoers), to create his authoritative position as playwright. For Jonson, his ideal audience unsuspectingly participates in his overall intent. In the final chapter, we will examine a cross between these two playwrights in Francis Beaumont’s *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. In this comedy, Beaumont, similar to Jonson and Shakespeare, plays upon the collaborative relationship between the playwright and the audience, but Beaumont appears to cater to rather than exploit or partner with his collaborators. In addition, Beaumont, who is as subtle as Shakespeare, uses the construction of the play and his imagined audience to call into question the theatrical tastes of the Blackfriars and

public theatergoers, invoking an audience that finds humor in their social position and in Beaumont's satire.

¹ Though Katherine Eisaman Maus discusses the connections between the play and the theater and though I agree with her statements (we both believe the alchemy on stage is meant to parallel the alchemy in the theater), this is not her main concern. In her introduction to *The Alchemist*, she also makes many other intriguing connections between the play and society. She discusses materialism, greed, language, and spirituality (861-865).

² Ouellete attributes these morality play features to Jonson's view of London: "In *The Alchemist*, Jonson adopted morality play features as a method for examining the social conduct and social changes he perceived in contemporary London" (379). In addition, while discussing the rank of each con artist, Ouellete eventually connects Face to the main vice figure: "Face's name, meaning 'vizard,' and his engineering of his confederates' action at the end of the scene (I.i.195,197) suggest that he is representative of the chief morality Vice, a part often performed by the lead player" (383).

³ Similarly, Jonson instills a moral overtone in his *Volpone*.

⁴ Editor Peter Happé also discusses other craftsmen who performed as actors in the York Cycle. However, few are as ironic, as Happé notes: "The pinner were makers of wire articles, pins and nails. Their craft is thus grimly suitable to nailing Christ to the cross" (525).

⁵ Judith Cook provides examples of “inns and taverns” where the troupes performed, such as the Bell and the Red Lion (11).

⁶ The Vagabonds Act is partially reproduced in Andrew Gurr’s *The Shakespearean Stage*. Gurr uses the Vagabond Act from E.K. Chamber’s *The Elizabethan Stage*; I use Gurr’s quotation here. In addition, Gurr also discusses the Vagabonds Act of 1572 and its attempt to limit who could serve as a patron in his book *The Shakespearian Playing Companies*, 1996. See pages 36-38.

⁷ Ouellette makes a similar connection. See page 381. Furthermore, Ouellette remarks that this maneuver reiterates the difference between the contemporary acting troupes and the medieval players: “The structuring of the rogues’ profession as a capitalist enterprise signifies how far the theater had become removed from the guild system” (384).

⁸ The direct correlation between the 1572 Vagabonds Act and the creation of the London theaters is of particular interest to me in that it shows the transition from traveling actors to actors performing in their own companies and theaters, as Andrew Gurr points out. However, another connection between criminals and actors can also be drawn from the cony-catching pamphlets that Jonathan Hayes discusses in his argument for *The Alchemist* as a “new conception of criminality” associated with “a new structure of economic and social opportunities” (18).

⁹ *The Norton Anthology of English Renaissance Drama* glosses “suckle him” as “suck him dry” (921).

¹⁰ *The Norton Anthology of English Renaissance Drama* glosses this particular statement as “If I allow my eyes to deceive me like this without my active connivance, may some whore blind me by urinating in my eyes” (886).

CHAPTER IV

THE ELITE PATRONS AND THE MIDDLE CLASS:
COLLABORATION AND AUDIENCE
IN FRANCIS BEAUMONT'S *THE KNIGHT OF THE BURNING PESTLE*

In the 1986 film, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, the title character, played by Matthew Broderick, fakes a fever in order to skip school. After scheming to get his girlfriend, Sloane Peterson, out of class and coaxing his genuinely ill friend (Cameron Frye) to participate in the day's adventures, the three "borrow" a Ferrari and head into Chicago for a meal, baseball game, and rendition of "Danke Shoen." Meanwhile, the antagonists, Ferris' sister and the Dean of Students, attempt to prove that Ferris has gotten away with yet another scheme. As Cameron lets go of his melancholy, the plot progresses until the Ferrari crashes and the Dean returns to school empty-handed. Though the structure of *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* is not complicated—it's just another teen movie—the film has a unique charm, owing much of its popularity to Ferris' intentional relationship with the audience and his continual breaking of the fourth wall. At one point, Ferris turns to the theatergoers and tells them how to fake an illness:

The key to faking out the parents is the clammy hands. It's a good non-specific symptom. I'm a big believer in it. A lot of people will tell you that a good phony fever is a good lock, but, uh, if you get a nervous mother you could end up in the doctor's office. And that's worse than school.

Ferris' maneuver relies on the audience accepting these comments and finding humor in them, a risky adventure. Nevertheless, in this instance, *Ferris Bueller* achieves the unique balance between the patrons and the film, earning the production favorable reviews and a Golden Globe nomination for Matthew Broderick. Here, as we have seen so many times before in Renaissance drama, the theatergoers play a huge part in the performance and its outcome, and the playwright, in this case the director as well, presents this balance on the stage/screen.

Even though Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* does not include a camera, Chicago, or even "Danke Shoen," it also intentionally breaks the fourth wall, relies heavily on its playgoers, and examines the interaction between the stage and the theatergoers; its grocer and his wife often talk directly to the actors and in the epilogue directly to the Blackfriars' patrons. While *The Knight*'s characters are not providing a "how-to guide to ditching school," they too are attempting the same risky maneuver displayed in *Ferris*, but with different results. Instead of receiving a Golden Globe nomination in 1607, *The Knight* faltered days after its initial performance and disappeared until Robert Keyser revived the play in quarto form in 1613. Several rejuvenated productions occurred throughout the seventeenth century, and then, once again, the play vanished, reappearing in the 1900s (Zitner 42-46).¹ After this final re-emergence, *The Knight* found a steady market for its antics, making its way into modern anthologies and stages as well as eventually transforming *The Knight* into a classic work of Early Modern drama.

In this chapter, I analyze *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* not only to hypothesize about the play's initial bleak premier, but also to examine its discussions of audience. Continuing in the footsteps of other Beaumont scholars, I question the play's satiric nature and its rendition of the middle class (George, Nell, and their apprentice Rafe); however, I discuss these issues through the lens of *The Knight's* imagined or staged audience, collaboration, and authority. First, I examine how *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* focuses on collaboration. In contrast to the plays we previously discussed, *The Knight* addresses collaboration through the play's satiric slant and through its fictional auditors. Furthermore, Beaumont initially displays the audience (both real and imagined) as the primary figures in the relationship. He approaches the audience as collaborators and portrays them as dominant partners, bringing issues of authority again to the forefront. However, as I argue in the second section, Beaumont also creates a realistic representation of a prosperous bourgeoisie, contrary to the desires of the Blackfriars' theatergoers, and a satirical comedy, in contradiction to the wishes of his fictional auditors. This unexpected combination calls into question the expectations and dominant authority of the audience. Beaumont declares that placing too much emphasis on the audience's desires, "audience addressed," does not accurately portray the playwright/playgoer relationship. In addition, his satiric though realist image of a burgeoning middle class invokes Beaumont's ideal audience and model collaborative union. Beaumont envisions an audience that co-creates rather than dominates the performance and a collaborative partnership that not only works together to produce a comedy, similar to Shakespeare's model collaborative union, but also a relationship that

cooperates to change society. In this work of prodigal sons, romance, and adventure, issues of authority are prevalent, but in the end, the playwright and the audience partner together to change the social perspective.

I

As I have declared in the previous chapters, Renaissance playwrights address their audiences as collaborators. However, in contrast to Shakespeare's and Jonson's works, in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, we do not have to look far to discover that the play approaches the audience from this perspective. On a basic level, the citizens, George and Nell, participate as the chorus to *Henry V* describes. Their imaginations interact with the performance, and they encourage the theatergoers to do the same. However, while *The Knight* shares these characteristics with the prologues, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Alchemist*, it also differs considerably in its representations of audience. *The Knight*, unlike our previous discussions, gives its audiences, both real and imagined, center stage. George and Nell not only contribute to the performance, but also literally reconstruct the play's plot. Furthermore, the theatrical tastes of the Blackfriars' theatergoers control much of the performance. Whether it is the upper class clientele or the play's fictional auditors, *The Knight*, at first glance, focuses on the audiences' authority over the production and in the collaborative relationship.

In 1607, the Children of the Queen's Revels first performed *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* at a private, indoor theater known as the second Blackfriars.² This theater, particularly its clientele and repertoire, plays a huge part in *The Knight's*

discussions of audience. The Blackfriars theater owes much of its distinction to its location. Situated in the district of Blackfriars, the theater was uniquely “inside the walls yet outside London’s jurisdiction by virtue of special privilege deriving from its former monastic status” (Dillon 128). Furthermore, this section of London was known for its rich inhabitants, including the Lord Chamberlain (Gurr 16). When Richard Farrant leased the theater in 1576 for his Chapel Boys, he began to cater to the district’s aristocratic community, charging a weightier admission than its public playhouse rivals. Farrant’s purchase, as Wiggins describes, “was the respectable face of the mid-1570’s theater boom: performing weekly rather than daily like their adult counterparts, the boy companies catered for more exclusive audiences and charged higher admission” (13). In fact, as David Bevington notes, “the price of admission could be as much as six times that at public theaters such as the Globe or the Swan” (1067). Though Farrant’s theater folded after many battles between his widowed wife and the original owner of the property William More, in 1596 James Burbage purchased the property, and transformed it, once again, into a private theater, continuing the legacy Farrant started.³ *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* was originally performed at Burbage’s theater, the second Blackfriars.

Along with its exclusive patrons, the Blackfriars also preferred a select bill of fare, performing predominantly satires of London’s citizens. This repertoire, as Bevington notes, often got the boy’s acting company and their playhouse into trouble: “Both the Crown and the London authorities were wary of topical political commentary. Sexual innuendo in the boy’s plays was often offensive to the morals of ordinary citizens.” Bevington also cites that the boy troupes were shut down for these infractions

in the 1590's only to reopen again in 1599 where they "went on with what they had been doing before, thumbing their noses at figures of authority and at London's citizens" (1067). The boy's satiric repertoire relates to their elite clientele. The steep price of admission limited the audience to predominantly upper class playgoers, or at least those wealthy enough to afford a ticket, and these theatergoers wanted to see something suitable to their liking, since they had paid so much for admission: what better way to entertain the upper class than to make fun of the bourgeoisie?⁴ Furthermore, what better venue to satirize the bourgeoisie than in a theater in which the middle class could probably not afford to attend? From this perspective, the rich upper class could maintain their elitism and enjoy an evening's entertainment in the process. Though I understand that any venue and any audience, as discussed in reference to Ede and Lunsford's "audience addressed," wields some authority or sway within the collaborative union between the playwright and the audience, the private theaters, and particularly the Blackfriars, took this to the extreme, specializing in satires of the middle class and reflecting the desires of the theater's upper class clientele.⁵

Beaumont portrays the unique relationship between the elite patrons and the play's performance in the opening moments of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. Only seconds into the Induction, George, a citizen, climbs onto the stage and argues with the Prologue.

PROLOGUE: From all that's near the court, from all that's great,
 Within the compass of the city walls,
 We now have brought our scene—
 CITIZEN: Hold your speech, goodman boy!

PROLOGUE: What do you mean, sir?

CITIZEN: That you have no good meaning. This seven years there have been plays at this house, I have observed it, you have still girds at citizens; and now you call your play *The London Merchant*. Down with your title, boy, down with your title! (Induction 1-10)

George is angry that the Blackfriars theater, for the past seven years, has performed plays satirizing London's citizens; the theater and its repertoire have been taking "girds at citizen's" too long, according to George. His statements represent both the desires of the middle class and capture the authority of the upper class clientele. First, George's disgruntled, though honest, comments are true: the Blackfriars has been mocking the bourgeoisie since its reopening in 1599. And second, George's character reinforces the satiric repertoire of the theater. The upper class theatergoers are watching a bourgeoisie patron (who probably should not be there anyways) jump onto the stage, and then complain about what he has paid to see, the exact actions that the elite theatergoers would expect of a middle class playgoer. In addition, George, while his complaint is legitimate, has come to the wrong place to protest against the private theaters, and he has lost the price of admission in the process. Attempting to break the satirical system at Blackfriars, George perpetuates the same attitude he hopes to fight against, ultimately creating the satire the exclusive clientele expect and require.

In addition to the preferences of the Blackfriars' playgoers and the discussion of the theater's repertoire in *The Knight's* induction, the play's stage history also reflects the elite clientele's authority over the performance. As expected, Beaumont writes a satire that mocks the theatrical tastes of the bourgeoisie. However, when the Children of the

Queen's Revels performed *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, the Blackfriars' theatergoers scrutinized the performance and its content. After only a week in the theater, the play closed and was removed from the stage. In a letter to his friend, "Master Robert Keysar," Walter Burre, who printed *The Knight* and his letter in 1613, recalls the play's short-lived debut:

Sir, this unfortunate child, who in eight days (as lately I have learned) was begot and born, soon after was by his parents (perhaps because he was so unlike his brethren) exposed to the wide world, who, for want of judgment, or not understanding the privy mark of irony about it (which showed it was no offspring of any vulgar brain), utterly rejected it; so that for want of acceptance it was even ready to give up the ghost, and was in danger to have been smothered in perpetual oblivion. (1074)

The playgoers' rejection of the play forced *The Knight* from the stage and almost deleted it from history. This maneuver coupled with Beaumont's desire to write a satire for his audience describes the authoritative power of his theatergoers. Since they did not approve of the performance—we will discuss possible reasons why throughout this chapter—the play disappeared for several years. Although the Blackfriars' playgoers and the playwright worked within a collaborative union, the elite patrons here held the upper hand, controlling much of the relationship.

In addition to the Blackfriars' exclusive clientele, *The Knight* also internalizes the authority of another set of theatergoers, the play's fictional auditors. While the fictional auditors are a satirization of the middle class' theatrical tastes and a manifestation of the authority of the Blackfriars' theatergoers, they also represent audience authority. After

arguing with the Prologue over how *The London Merchant* will take “girds at citizens” (Induction 8), George helps his wife onto the stage. George and Nell along with their apprentice, Rafe, make up the fictional auditors, those who represent the middle class and who have come to see *The London Merchant*. These fictional auditors exhibit similarities and inherent differences with the Athenian audience in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Both the citizens and the Athenians verbally interact with the performance, altering the play as it progresses. However, their position in the performance and their level of authority varies. When Theseus remarks on the Rude Mechanicals’ performance, his sentiments are welcomed and addressed. For example, after Theseus comments on the wall’s cursing, “The wall methinks, being sensible, should curse again” (5.1.180-181), Bottom, who is supposed to be playing Pyramus, breaks the fourth wall and talks directly to Theseus: “No, in truth, sir, he should not. ‘Deceiving me’ is Thisbe’s cue. She is to enter now, and I am to spy her through the wall. You shall see, it will fall pat as I told you” (5.1. 182-185).⁶ Though Bottom steps out of character to address Theseus, remarking extemporaneously instead of sticking to the script, Theseus’ small comment serves as a polite addition to the scene and does not transform the performance in the same way that George’s remarks to the Prologue revise *The London Merchant*.

In contrast to the Duke, George’s objections to the proposed play are not welcomed but rather ridiculed because he is a bourgeois patron complaining about the private theaters to the elite clientele these theaters serve; his perspective is absurd, and the upper class theatergoers view him as such, hence the satiric nature of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. Nevertheless, within the play’s satiric outlook, George and Nell

eventually assume control of the performance, transforming *The London Merchant* into something they want to see and, in the process, continuing to satirize London's citizens. After George expresses his initial disgust with the intended performance of *The London Merchant*, the Prologue asks George what he would prefer to watch:

PROLOGUE: You seem to be an understanding man. What would you have us do, sir?

CITIZEN: Why, present something notably in honor of the commons of the city.

PROLOGUE: Why, what do you say to *The Life and Death of Fat Drake*, or *The Repairing of Fleet Privies*?

CITIZEN: I do not like that; but I will have a citizen and he shall be of my own trade.

PROLOGUE: Oh, you should have told us your mind a month since. Our play is ready to begin now.

CITIZEN: 'Tis all one for that. I will have a grocer, and he shall do admirable things. (Induction 24-35)

Even though the Prologue initially objects—"you should have told us your mind a month since"—the grocer overrules the Prologue and begins to create the play he wants to see, a play that honors his trade and has a grocer as the main character. This maneuver places the authority of the stage in George's and later Nell's hands and creates the play's satiric outlook.

In support of this audience's authority, the actors, except for one boy, immediately conform to the citizens' desires. Similar to the Blackfriars' theatergoers, George's and Nell's wishes are followed with little opposition. After Nell declares that she wants to see the grocer knight fight a lion—"Let him kill a lion with a pestle, husband. Let him kill a lion with a pestle" (Induction 43-44)—her ridiculous idea is immediately added to the script in progress. However, all the boys have a part already in

The London Merchant; therefore, there is no one left to play the valiant grocer. Nell, who is always ready with a suggestion, poses a solution to the problem: “Husband, husband,” Nell declares “for God’s sake, let Rafe play him. Beshrew me if I do not think he will go beyond them all” (Induction 61-62).⁷ The actors quickly add Rafe to the cast and begin *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. This action both satirizes the citizens and the overeager actors (the on-stage audience), who appear to perform any action George and Nell wish in order to keep their patrons, the citizens and the Blackfriars’ theatergoers, happy. This scene emphasizes audience authority not only in that Nell’s request is followed but also that the actors, who already have parts and who have expressed that there are no more actors to play the grocer knight, turn their attention to George and Nell’s directions. In his introduction to *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, Arthur Kinney discusses this turn as the key element to the performance:

Yet at the dead center of this play, voluntarily defrauded without any urging from George and Nell, the boys of the Blackfriars Company, acting *The London Merchant*, turn all their talents to extemporizing the scenes at the Bell Inn and Barbaroso’s shop, and even the kingdom of Cracovia. In their world, they play many parts—that is their world—just as we play many parts in our own. (527)

One of these parts is the role of following George’s and Nell’s demands. In fact, all of the boys, except for one, perform as the citizens desire. On several occasions, the character titled “The Boy” questions the citizens’ thoughts; however, he always does as the citizens proclaim. For example, after George and Nell make Mistress Merrythought leave the stage without performing her part, George declares that he wants to see “Rafe and this whoreson giant quickly.” The Boy objects: “In good faith, sir, we cannot.

You'll utterly spoil our play and make it to be hissed, and it cost money" (3.3.11-14).

After George and the Boy make an agreement that George will not call on the Boy directly, the Boy brings Rafe and Barboroso onto the stage, performing as George asked.

The Boy also follows a similar pattern in Act Four. In Scene One, the Boy disapproves of Nell's suggestion to have Rafe court the King of Cracovia's daughter. "It will show ill-favoredly to have a grocer's prentice to court a King's daughter." However, shortly thereafter, the Boy still performs Nell's wish, proclaiming "It shall be done [To the audience] It is not our fault gentlemen!" (4.1.46-54). Throughout the performance, the Boy continues this exchange, first opposing the citizens and then following their commands, and, even in his opposition—"It is not our fault gentlemen!"—he still submits to the citizens' desires, no matter how absurd. By the end of the performance, the Boy and the Children of the Queen's Revel's have followed George and Nell's commands until they have dismantled and reconstructed *The London Merchant* to match the citizens' desires. Instead of altering the performance for a moment, as Shakespeare's Theseus does, George, with the help of Nell, transforms the entire play, controlling the script, action, and casting. However, their depiction still reflects the desires of the Blackfriars' theatergoers, who want to see a play satirizing the middle class, and portrays a dominant audience within the playwright/playgoer relationship.

While the audience, both real and imagined, wields a megaphone in *The Knight's* performance and plot, the playwright in Beaumont's satire is, at first, non-existent and silent. Where does the playwright lie in a play that appears to be all about the audience? Furthermore, why did the Blackfriars' theatergoers not approve of this particular play that

is obviously satirizing the middle class and that emphasizes their authority as audience members? In the next section, I begin to answer these questions and look specifically at Beaumont's representation of George and Nell. Hidden within this satiric play rests a realistic glance at the bourgeoisie's social position, complicating the play's absurdities and satiric outlook as well as the theatergoers' authority over the stage. This maneuver questions an unbalanced collaborative dynamic and favors a social partnership between the playwright and the audience, a union similar to Shakespeare's ideal collaborative relationship. *The Knight* is not simply a text laden with the absurd desires of the bourgeoisie and an attempt to pacify the Blackfriars' theatergoers, but, in fact, a work that subtly embraces the burgeoning middle class and the changes that were occurring to accommodate this new social structure. In *The Knight*, Beaumont begins to transform the satire of London's citizens and to invoke his ideal audience.

II

Other critics have hypothesized about why Beaumont's satire did not please the Blackfriars' theatergoers. For example, Alfred Harbage, in his *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions*, examines Beaumont's depiction of the middle class and what this representation reveals about Beaumont and his satire. At first, Harbage praises *The Knight* and its satirical look at London's citizens as one of the best seventeenth-century satires: "Francis Beaumont's *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, although lagging five years behind the attack of 1600-1602 [the war of the theaters], provides the most thorough and

most amusing parody of popular drama and caricature of citizen auditors” (106-107).

Then Harbage turns to how *The Knight* differs from other similar performances:

The little citizen family representing the popular audience, George the grocer, Nell his wife, and Rafe their apprentice, is shrewdly drawn, and except that Nell fails to understand the very type of play designed to please her kind, the behavior of the three tells us many true things about London’s humbler playgoers. What distinguishes Beaumont’s satire, indeed, is its basis in truth and sympathy. The play was not a success. . . *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* was performed not before citizens but before the Blackfriars coterie, and probably did not fail so much because it satirized citizens as because it did so without animosity. The grocer is neither a fool nor a niggard, and his wife is not a slut. (107)

Instead of imagining an extreme and unrealistic representation of London’s citizens, citizens who are misers and prostitutes, Beaumont, according to Harbage, creates a sympathetic view of the bourgeoisie; this unexpected maneuver causes the play to fail.

I, too, believe that Beaumont creates a satire that provides a truthful depiction of the citizens and that this view critiques the bourgeoisie “without animosity”; however, as I argue, the “true things about London’s humbler playgoers” that Beaumont brings to the stage include not only a realistic view of the citizens themselves—citizens were grocers and not necessarily misers and prostitutes—but also a realistic social depiction of London’s burgeoning middle class. This honest representation was too truthful and too accurate for the Blackfriars’ theatergoers. They were expecting to see something outrageous, an exaggeration of the middle class’ theatrical tastes and social position, but what they received was a prosperous George and Nell. An examination of a similar modern example clarifies this assertion.

In the 1970s and 1980s television sitcom *The Jeffersons*, George and Louise (Weezy) have “finally got a piece of the pie.” They have accomplished the American dream, moving from their humble home to a “deluxe apartment in the sky.” This show realistically represents the burgeoning African American middle class “movin’ on up” into a predominantly white upper class neighborhood, and *The Jeffersons* focuses on the racial as well as economic tensions involved in this maneuver. Furthermore, this witty sitcom uses these tensions to create humor and to question the audience’s point of view. In order to laugh at the racial and economic jokes and inferences, the audience must be comfortable with the Jeffersons’ social position. Instead of watching a show that just makes fun of the Jeffersons, the sitcom sympathizes with their position and finds humor in the situation, calling into question the viewer’s beliefs. If the viewer cannot cross the barrier between upper and middle class and black and white, he or she misses the humor in this groundbreaking show. In comparison, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* works in much the same way. In addition to creating a humorous representation of the middle class, it also produces a positive and realistic portrayal of London’s citizenry. The theatergoers must accept the arrival of the burgeoning middle class, along with their theatrical tastes, into London’s elite communities in order to find humor in Beaumont’s play. Since the Blackfriars’ theatergoers were uncomfortable with Beaumont’s realistic representation, the play faltered. Nevertheless, through capturing this view of London’s social issues, Beaumont questions the social expectations of the theatergoers and invokes an audience that can cope with and even find humor in his realistic and satirical representation of the bourgeoisie.

The depiction of George and Nell and of the middle class becomes clearer if we survey the class structure of the Elizabethan-Jacobean period. Similar to today's social scales, "class" in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries did not denote a distinct and solidified stratification of social groupings. However, historians generally agree on three divisions.⁸ Here I follow Louis Wright's categories in which "the highest class consisted of the titled nobility, the landed gentry, and the more important members of the learned professions" and "the lowest class was composed of unskilled laborers, and illiterate peasantry." The third division, the focus of Beaumont's comedy, "was a great class of merchants, tradesfolk, and skilled craftsmen, a social group whose thoughts and interests centered in business profits" (2). For the purposes of this discussion, Wright's definitions provide a point of reference and a way initially to distinguish Beaumont's middle class from other social groups in the play. In *The Knight*, the aristocratic audience of the second Blackfriars theater and the would-be lover Humphrey represent the gentry, while no main character depicts the lower class.⁹ Furthermore, the citizens and their apprentice, along with the households of Merrythought and Venturewell, are members of the middle class. In addition to these divisions, the social scale in the period was also fluid: "the highest caste was eternally being recruited from the ranks of the rich merchants, and the lowest was always being swelled by economy derelicts. From both extremes the middle class absorbed new recruits" (Wright 2). *The Knight* initially perpetuates the divisions, placing the Blackfriars' theatergoers above the on-stage citizens, but ultimately the play focuses on social fluidity.

Almost as soon as the Prologue takes the stage, *The Knight* begins to draw attention to the middle class' prosperity. As we observed in section one, George, a citizen grocer, enters the play only seconds after its opening, interrupts the Prologue, and insists that the play, *The London Merchant*, and the second Blackfriars theater cannot accurately depict the mercantile workers of London: "This seven years there hath been plays at this house, I have observed it, you have still girds at citizens; and now you call your play *The London Merchant*. Down with your title, boy, down with your title!" (Induction 6-10). At this point, the scene satirizes the bourgeoisie and highlights the authority of the upper class theatergoers; however, George's comments do not stop here. After drawing attention to the theater's reputation, George provides a list of possible plays that he would like to see performed: "Why could not you be contented, as well as others, with *The Legend of Whittington*, or *The Life and Death of Sir Thomas Gresham*, with the *Building of the Royal Exchange*? Or *The Story of Queen Eleanor*, with the *Rearing of London Bridge upon Woolsacks*" (Induction 20-23)? Though George's comments reflect mock heroism—he speaks of these mercantile accomplishments as if they were epic moments—they also serve another purpose. By quickly noting the Blackfriars theater as a location that is not friendly to the middle class and then highlighting two mercantile accomplishments, the Royal Exchange and the London Bridge, George focuses the theatergoers' attention to London's merchant prosperity and pride as well as to the fluidity of the class structures.

When George insists that his list of plays exemplify the bourgeoisie better than *The London Merchant*, he expresses his pride in his social position and begins to create a

realistic and positive portrayal of the middle class. According to Wright, “no characteristic is more significant of the quality of the Elizabethan middle class than the self-respecting pride of the citizenry in their accomplishments and in the dignity of their position in the commonwealth” (19). George’s reference to Sir Thomas Gresham, a local merchant, is of particular interest because he symbolizes the accomplishments and pride of the middle class. Sir Thomas Gresham built the Royal Exchange from his own wealth between 1566 and 1568 (Bevington, 1076, n. 3). The Royal Exchange became the center of commercial enterprise in London as well as a “meeting place of traders from the ends of the earth” (Wright 11). In addition, Gresham aspired to the title of “sir” and, along with other middle class merchants, constructed “funerals which were showy and expensive far beyond their degree” (Stone 576). Gresham, an entrepreneur and icon, represents the accomplishments and prosperity of the middle class as well as the fluidity of the class structures. The bourgeoisie and the upper class profited from Gresham’s accomplishments, and Gresham himself moved from the middle to the upper class. George’s reference to this well-known merchant and his approval of a play about the builder of the Royal Exchange shows how the bourgeoisie were “moving on up” in London’s society. In addition, George’s references also draw further attention to merchant prosperity in the city.

Along with the accomplishments of building the Royal Exchange and London Bridge, George’s comments internalize an image of the growing middle class. During the early seventeenth century, the mercantile districts were expanding, encroaching on the upper class communities and becoming the city’s center of attention. In comparison

to the Blackfriars district, most of the mercantile portions of the city were also within London's wall, but slowly expanding to the suburbs. "Paul's Churchyard was almost entirely appropriated by the booksellers . . . Cook-shops shared Thames Street with the stock-fishmongers. The wet-fishmongers were to be found in Knightrider Street and Bridge Street." In addition, grocers and apothecaries owned shops on Bucklersbury, and printers were moving to Fleet Street, a portion of London outside of the wall and a part of the growing suburbs (Byrne 81). These streets, filled with merchants and entrepreneurial apprentices, helped transform London into a town of commerce and a city known for its mercantile districts. Furthermore, the mercantile districts began to encompass the upper class communities. Cheapside became "a sight which travelers noted in their diaries. Rich silks from China, rare spices from the Indies, plate of hammered silver and gold, glassware from Venice, besides the endless array of articles of commoner use, filled the shops" (Wright 11). George would have more than likely worked near or on Bucklersbury between West Cheap, Watling Street, and Dowgate and in the prosperous Cheapside district. Furthermore, it is probably a grocer's shop on Bucklersbury in which George begins Rafe's adventures and a tale "notably in honor of the commons of the city" (Induction 26-27). Through George's objection to this house and his references to the Royal Exchange and London Bridge, *The Knight* constructs an image of the busy and heavily populated mercantile streets, a positive portrayal of a growing middle class that has now physically invaded the Blackfriars theater and the upper class districts of London.

Not only is the picture of the middle class important to George and to creating a positive portrayal of the bourgeoisie, but it is also necessary to understand the contours of Beaumont's satire throughout the production. As previously mentioned, grocers and apothecaries occupied the mercantile street of Bucklersbury. This sharing of space emphasizes a specific meaning of "pestle" and complicates the usual reading of the play as just a satiric look at the middle class. After George insists that the play he wishes to see should contain a grocer who performs "admirable things," Nell, George's wife, enthusiastically demands that Rafe kill a lion with a grocer's or apothecary's instrument: "Let him kill a lion with a pestle, husband. Let him kill a lion with a pestle" (Induction 43-44). Nell's insistence is often noted for its sexual pun: "pestle . . . evokes an onomatopoeic 'pissle' or 'pisser'" (MacFarlane 156). However, a "pestle" is "an instrument (usually club-shaped) for bruising or pounding substances in mortar . . . esp. those used by the apothecary in tritulating and compounding drugs; hence taken as the symbol of the profession" (*OED*). While the suggestion of killing a lion with a pestle or infecting it with "burning" syphilis is humorous, it must be noted that the location of grocers on Bucklersbury and George's demand that *The Knight* begin in a grocery favors the apothecary definition of "pestle." Moreover, it is not a bourgeois character that suggests the term "burning." George offers the title "*The Grocer's Honor*" for Rafe's adventures and the actor playing the Prologue offers "*The Knight of the Burning Pestle*" (Induction 94-95). The tension between the Prologue and George, as well as George's insistence that the acting company perform a play suitable to his liking instead of the dull *London Merchant*, adds to the comedic tension of the scene and provides a reason for the

Prologue to suggest “burning.” The actor, one who has taken “girds at citizens” in other productions, is once again attacking the middle class. Nevertheless, though the play emphasizes the apothecary definition of “pestle,” the inescapable connotation of “pissle” still remains. This effect occurs throughout the production: a joke often has several meanings, and a scene often has both a satirical and a social layer. In this second layer, *The Knight* embraces and understands the position of the middle class as the play creates comedy.

Beaumont represents this layered effect, depicting middle class prosperity and satirizing the bourgeoisie at the same time, not only through George’s initial objection to the play, but also through the unusual arrangement of the Induction; however, by looking at the composition of the Induction, we observe a successful branching out of the role of the citizen in the theater rather than just in the mercantile districts. “In George and Nell . . . Beaumont alters the private-theater induction’s usual target for complaints about disruptive and inattentive spectators—gallants more interested in sartorial and critical self-display than the players’ and playwright’s art” (Bliss 4). In *The Knight*, a citizen spectator and, arguably a “disruptive” audience member, interrupts and complains about the private theaters, and, in contradiction to the Prologue’s sarcastic suggestion of a play about “*The Life and Death of Fat Drake, or the Repairing of Fleet Privies*,” George insists that the play “will have a citizen, and he shall be of my own trade” (Induction 28-31). The juxtaposition of an audience member complaining about the stage instead of the Induction complaining about the audience moves the criticism of unruly spectators away from the bourgeoisie and towards the playgoers. Since George, presumably a disorderly

audience member, is complaining about the private theater rather than actors in the private theater complaining about the unruly citizens, the Induction expands George's presence in the theater from merely a spectator to director of the stage. Indeed, the theatrical desires of the bourgeoisie are invading the space, both the district and the playhouse, in which the private theaters took "girds at citizens." The arrangement of the Induction serves as an empowering moment for George as well as the middle class he represents. George and later Nell continue this control throughout Beaumont's comedy.

The Knight also acknowledges the newly acquired power of the middle class through its subsequent depictions of George as a wealthy merchant. In Act Two, while Rafe looks for Mistress Merrythought's "casket and wrought purse" (2.5.57), he spends a night at the Bell Inn. When Rafe wakes in the morning and attempts to continue his journey, the Tapster insists that Rafe pay twelve shillings for his lodgings. George and Nell are satisfied that the "old knight is merry with Rafe" (3.2.27-28) until the Tapster's request becomes an ultimatum: "Twelve shillings you must pay, or I will cap you" (3.2.37). At this point, George pays the Tapster the rent, but he does so in an exasperated manner. In this scene, the Tapster's insistence for the twelve shillings almost stops the action of the play. However, as Leggatt explains, "the Citizen's intervention breaks a stalemate that threatened to stop the play dead; Rafe and the Host were fixed in opposed positions from which neither would budge. His cash . . . allows the play to continue. It is like putting a nickel in the slot to see the rest of the show" (301-302). George's monetary exchange with the Tapster represents the prosperous position of the middle class. George has enough money on hand to pay for his apprentice's lodgings and for his admission to

the expensive private theater. He would have paid at least sixpence to enter the Blackfriars theater and approximately another twelve pence for the admission of his wife and apprentice (Zitner 12). Furthermore, he would have paid for countless admissions in the past seven years. George's monetary position, his ability to pay for these expenses, adds to the depiction of a prosperous middle class and supports the play's awareness of the burgeoning bourgeoisie.

Besides confirming the wealth of the middle class, Beaumont allows George and Nell to organize or manipulate most of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, a maneuver that both satirizes the middle class and highlights their improving social position. Within the central control of George and Nell is the action and plot of Rafe's adventures, a tale of merchant chivalry.¹⁰ Merchant chivalry, as a genre of the Renaissance stage, is "analeptic—a representational 'reaching back' performed in the service of new subjects and new interests . . . Merchant chivalry thus analeptically expresses middle-class aspirations (and frustrations) by deploying an appropriated aristocratic ideology" (MacFarlene 138). Even though Finella MacFarlene eventually critiques *The Knight* as an "antitype" of merchant chivalry, she addresses the significance of this genre as a return to the social ways of the past. Indeed, it is this return and manipulation of the past that occurs in Rafe's adventures; however, in *The Knight* the return is fraught with the play's awareness of the growing and prospering middle class.

When George declares that he wants a play with "a grocer" knight who does "admirable things," he describes a medieval romance, where a knight travels the countryside fighting evildoers and saving damsels in distress (Induction 34-35).

Changing the usual knight figure into a knight who is also a grocer's apprentice instills merchant chivalry into this older genre. Following in the romance tradition, once the play has officially begun, Rafe, the Knight of the Burning Pestle, acquires a dwarf and a squire, and this lively crew searches for Mistress Merrythought's money, battles the monster Barbaroso, wanders through the countryside, and obeys George and Nell's every command. Nevertheless, *The Knight* takes these romance elements to the extreme, once again satirizing the middle class, but, as we shall see, also pinpointing their improving social position. In Act One, Rafe goes so far as to teach Tim how to speak like a knight's squire: "My beloved squire Tim, stand out. Admit this were a desert, and over it a knight-errant pricking, and I should bid you inquire of his intents. What would you say?" When Tim replies with an unacceptable statement—"Sir, my master sent me to know whither you are riding"—Rafe corrects him. "No, thus: 'Fair sir, the right courteous and valiant Knight of the Burning Pestle commanded me to inquire upon what adventure you are bound, whether to relieve some distressed damsel or otherwise'" (1.3.71-79). Within this humorous yet chaotic adventure (and language lesson), the plot, including the newly constructed merchant chivalry, highlights a medieval romantic past, a time containing a clearly defined social scale and a weak middle class. At first, this "analeptic" occurrence seems to diminish the powerful position of the Elizabethan and Jacobean middle class; however, we must not forget that the bourgeois merchants George and Nell control Rafe's journeys.

During the fight with Barbaroso, George tells Rafe to "falsify a blow," and he makes sure that Rafe knows "the giant lies open on the left side" (3.4.33-34), both

constructing Rafe's fight with the giant and then saving Rafe from Barbaroso's anger. Furthermore, in the final act, Nell also begins to take control as she insists that Rafe "call all the youths together in battle 'ray, with drums, and guns, and flags, and march to Mile End in pompous fashion, and there exhort your soldiers to be merry and wise, and to keep their beards from burning" (5.1.57-61). The citizens continue to construct Rafe's adventure throughout the performance. By placing these episodes under the control of the citizens, *The Knight* twists a moment that could confirm aristocratic values into an instance that exemplifies merchant power. George and Nell are not only well off and imaginative – they can concoct a play in a moment's notice – but they can also transform the solidified class images inherent in medieval romances into an empowering representation of their own social station. No matter how humorous the escapade or how crazy the adventure, the citizens are given complete and unlimited control of the drama and of reconstructing the social scale.

In addition to these realistic views of a burgeoning, powerful middle class contained in the Induction and Rafe's adventures, the original play the citizens came to see, *The London Merchant*, also affirms the bourgeoisie's social position. While Bevington points out that *The London Merchant* "is so painfully clichéd that it deserves what it gets at the hands of the Citizen and his wife" and that this portion of *The Knight* is a moment where "Beaumont balances his satire of popular culture with a quizzical look at the other side of the debate between popular and elite," (1072)¹¹ recent criticism has often taken the opposite approach, viewing *The London Merchant* as "a social satire aimed at the very ethos of the city—the mercantile mentality" (Samuelson 307).

However, such a reading eliminates George and Nell's reaction to *The London Merchant* and the sections of the play devoted to the control and mobility of the middle class.¹² Embedded in the satirical nature of the prodigal son play, *The London Merchant* includes two perspectives of marriage and wealth that depict the mobility and prosperity of the middle class. In Act One, Scene One, the prosperous merchant Venturewell and his apprentice Jasper take the stage. Shortly thereafter, Venturewell dismisses Jasper because the young apprentice loves Venturewell's daughter, Luce. This encounter is both quick and to the point; Venturewell does not want his daughter to marry Jasper. Later, in the second section of *The London Merchant*, Venturewell declares that the well-born Master Humphrey will have Luce's hand in marriage, an action that completes the love triangle and the rehearsed plot of the play. At first, these scenes appear as stereotypical plots of a romantic comedy and of a prodigal son play; however, George and Nell's commentary complicates this notion.

Contrary to theatrical conventions, both of the citizens take the side of Humphrey rather than the youthful lovers Luce and Jasper. George even goes so far as to call the pair "little infidels" and their plot "some abomination knavery in this play" (1.1.62-64). George's objection to the love plot of *The London Merchant* derives from his notion that the youth are "going against the authority of a fellow elder citizen" (Miller 72) and, perhaps, from the fact that Jasper falls in love with his employer's daughter, thereby disregarding his apprenticeship. In addition, George and Nell disapprove of Venturewell – Nell calls him a "rascally tyrant" and "an old stringer in's days" (1.2.35) – but bestow their praises on the "gentle blood and gentle seem" of Humphrey (1.2.10). The citizens

adamantly approve of the union between the gentleman and the shopkeeper's daughter, and they insist that Rafe will stop the undesirable union between Luce and Jasper. Even though it is unclear why the citizens disapprove of Venturewell (perhaps he is too dull for their liking) the primary focus of this section of *The London Merchant* is George's and Nell's fondness for Humphrey. George and Nell's approval of Humphrey both satirizes the middle class' theatrical tastes and highlights social fluidity.

The humor in this scene lies in the fact that George and Nell side with the stereotypical blocking figure, Humphrey. This type of figure was a staple on the Early Modern stage. In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the theatergoers are supposed to side with the young lovers instead of Juliet's father, Capulet. Furthermore, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the same sentiments apply to Hermia's father, Egeus, who wants to keep Hermia from her Lysander. When George and Nell side with the blocking figure, they commit a theatrical *faux pas*, creating yet another satirical moment. However, the union between Humphrey and Luce also represents the mobility and interdependence of the class system that Wright describes. "If a rich merchant could aspire to peerage or to lands and a coat of arms, many a daughter of a gentle house did not disdain a match with a tradesman who could offer her luxuries and the gaiety of the city" (Wright 2). Though Venturewell wants to marry his daughter to a rich man rather than a well-born woman marrying an apprentice, the scenario is the same: a middle class citizen could form a union with a member of the gentry. This action depicts a moment of pride for the middle class, who could aspire to move beyond their station, and a moment of anxiety for the upper class, who must now share their theatrical space and their beds with the

bourgeoisie. Furthermore, the citizen commentary continues to accentuate the realistic middle class invasion that began in the Induction.

III

Examining these moments where the citizens are satirized and, yet, realistically portrayed as arriving in the upper class community calls into question the expectations and authority of the audience (both real and imagined). While Beaumont appears to take great pains to satirize the bourgeoisie according to the wishes of the Blackfriars' theatergoers and to produce a play that George and Nell desire to see—the citizens get to control the plot, but their actions are silly—he also presents a realistic social portrait of a burgeoning middle class and works to dismantle a collaborative union where one of the participants dominates the relationship. Beaumont attempts to invoke a partnership with his audience that favors the relationship Shakespeare conjures in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. However, unlike Shakespeare, who does not draw attention directly to issues of authority within the collaborative union, Beaumont, similar to Jonson, portrays authority as a primary concern. Nevertheless, Beaumont does not highlight his own authority but promotes a shared authority between the playwright and the audience. Beaumont invokes an equal partnership with his audience.

In addition, through his imagined audience and his discussion of collaboration, Beaumont envisions collaboration as not only the means to producing a performance, but also as having the capacity to influence society. Beaumont's representation of collaboration strongly resembles Greenblatt's and LeFevre's examination of the

writer/audience relationship. Beaumont asserts that the playwright and the audience have the ability to alter and produce the “social will” (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 4).

Furthermore, for Beaumont, the playwright and the audience are “social beings” who participate “in a distinctive way with society and culture to produce something” (LeFevre 1). Beaumont imagines an audience that can embrace the middle class and that can break social boundaries and change social distinctions. He conjures an audience that will, regardless of their social station, accept Nell’s invitation to have a “pottle of wine and a pipe of tobacco” and that will invite their friends to the party (Epilogus 6-7). While George and Nell begin the performance trying to work against the elite patrons, they end up embracing them in the play’s final moments. Beaumont invokes an audience that will do the same, laughing at their own social biases and embracing their neighbors. Though the Blackfriars’ theatergoers were not quite ready to participate in this collaborative venture, Beaumont encourages this type of partnership and social consciousness. Beaumont’s view resembles Shakespeare’s ideal dynamic and entails Jonson’s investigation of authority; however, for Beaumont the effect of collaboration extends to outside of the theater.

¹ See Zitner's introduction to *The Knight* for a more thorough survey of the play's stage history after its initial debut in the Blackfriars theater.

² Here I use David Bevington's date for the first performance; however, as Dana Aspinall claims the first performance probably occurred "some time between 1607 and 1609" (169).

³ E.K. Chambers examines the specific circumstances under which the first Blackfriars was purchased and then eventually turned over to Henry Lord Hunsdon (2: 495-497). It is also interesting to note the reasons for More's anger at Farrant and his wife: "He complained that Farrant, after pretending that he only meant to teach the children in it, had made it a "continuell howse for plays' to the offence of the precinct, and to fit it for the purpose had pulled down and defaced Neville's partitions, spoiled the windows, and brought the house to great ruin" (vol. 2, 496). Furthermore, see E.K. Chambers vol. 2, pages 503-515 for a more thorough look at the transactions at the second Blackfriars and for a diagram of the property.

⁴ I also discuss the location of the Blackfriars theater and how its location limited the clientele to the upper class later in this chapter.

⁵ A list of companies and their repertoires is included in Harbage's *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions*, Appendix B, page 343-350.

⁶ All Shakespearean quotations are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare*.

⁷ See Laurie Osbourne's "Female Audiences and Female Authority in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*." *Exemplaria: A Journal in Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 3.2

(1991): 491-517 for a thorough investigation of Nell's individual, female authority.

While I discuss George and Nell's authority here in terms of their citizen status—I see them both as citizens and discuss their authority as a joint effort—Osbourne separates the couple and discusses Nell's gaze and authority.

⁸ R.H. Gretton's *The English Middle Class* also addresses the social structures.

⁹ Humphrey can also be read as a wealthy merchant; however, I favor “gentle blood and gentle seem” to mean Humphrey is a well-born member of society (1.2.10).

¹⁰ Laura Stevenson's *Praise and Paradox: Merchant and Craftsmen in Elizabethan Popular Culture* provides a discussion of the characteristics and roles of merchant chivalry on the Renaissance stage and mentality.

¹¹ Bevington also sees *The London Merchant* as a moment where the theatrical tastes of the upper class theatergoers were satirized, and he attributes this moment as one of the reasons why the play initially failed (1073).

¹² For another look at *The London Merchant* see Glenn Steinberg's “‘You Know the Plot/ We Both Agreed On?’: Plot, Self-Consciousness, and *The London Merchant* in Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*,” and John Doeblér's “Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and the Prodigal Son Plays.”

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have examined various representations of audience from the stage, working with and moving away from demographic studies and adding actors to our definition of audience. In addition, through these imagined audiences, I have analyzed how playwrights addressed their sixteenth and seventeenth-century playgoers as collaborators and how Shakespeare, Jonson, and Beaumont examined and characterized this relationship. Moreover, playwrights used their imagined audiences to invoke their ideal spectators, creating the playwright's identity and leaving behind clues about how they desire the audience to collaboratively participate. My hope is that this investigation not only enhances our scholarly understanding of these texts but also provides us with ways to embrace dramas in the classroom. Exploring Early Modern plays, their writers, and their content from this perspective allows us to see how playwrights approached and invoked their playgoers and how they continue to perform these maneuvers and invite the participation of modern theatergoers, readers, and students. These tactics, I believe, have helped produce the longevity of these writers and their plays while also providing teachers a way to combat students' usual "What does this have to do with me?" mentality.

Though I cannot claim that the playwright's attention to the audience is the sole reason why Early Modern plays have regained or maintained their popularity in our modern culture, I do believe that the playwright's collaborative approach to the audience

is a supporting factor. From their original theatergoers to the local crowd at the North Carolina Shakespeare Festival, playwrights through their imagined audiences have given four centuries of playgoers, readers, and students a part in the play and have conjured collaborators. Since these audiences have a role in the production and since the playwrights have defined their collaborative position, they continue to be drawn to these texts. In other words, we, as audience members, want to produce and read these texts because we are co-creators, and we want our creation to be successful.

The works of Shakespeare—the time bandit of Early Modern writers—have emerged in every conceivable modern venue. Many directors have offered their interpretation of Shakespeare’s works on the stage and in the cinemas, sometimes attempting to re-produce a play in its original Renaissance setting (Zeffirelli’s *Romeo and Juliet*) or even translating the play into modern California (*Ten Things I Hate About You*).¹ Furthermore, Shakespeare is a staple on high school reading lists and in classrooms, and countless festival acting troupes perform his works. From the Royal Shakespeare Company’s productions to Edmond, Oklahoma’s Shakespeare in the Park, Shakespeare is everywhere. While we can attribute this phenomenon to many factors (his wide range of topics, his ability to capture man’s inner turmoil, his impeccable word choice), perhaps we want to collaborate with these texts over and over again because he has invited us cordially to partner with his plays, and we are happy to do so.

In addition to Shakespeare, other Early Modern dramatists have withstood changes in modern stage practices and in readership. Currently, the Early English Books On-line (EEBO) database makes a large range of dramas accessible to modern,

technologically-minded students, who can now easily browse, as I did, texts without having to leave their homes. The success of this site marks the popularity and longevity of these texts and allows playwrights to continue to invoke their audiences. Furthermore, although Ben Jonson's plays, particularly *The Alchemist* (due to its setting and references to alchemy), appear to cater only to seventeenth-century playgoers, these works do, indeed, also have longevity. In fact, the entire book *Ben Jonson and Theatre* is devoted to staging, directing, and performing productions of Jonson's plays and provides specific insights into the 1996 Sydney performance of *The Alchemist*, starring Geoffrey Rush.² While time and location distance us from the text and while Jonson imagines and invokes his audience as unsuspecting rather than conscious collaborators, we are, nevertheless, still very close to *The Alchemist*. We return to it even if it teaches us a skewed moral lesson or encourages us to be gullible.

The Knight of the Burning Pestle works in much the same way. Though it too appears to favor its original theater and theatergoers, Beaumont has invoked his ideal audience. The Shenandoah Shakespeare Express performed *The Knight* at the Folger Shakespeare Library in 1999, and the Shakespeare Institute Players produced the play in 2004.³ While the play did not succeed with its initial audience, Beaumont has accomplished his goal and has invoked an audience that will have a drink with George and Nell after the performance. These productions of both *The Alchemist* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* provide modern theatergoers a chance to interact and collaborate with these texts, and, once again, perhaps Jonson's and Beaumont's attention to the audience contributes to their revivals.

Though these productions and efforts to preserve Early Modern drama reinforce an on-going collaborative relationship between the playwrights and their now expanded audience, students often feel disconnected from these texts. For example, in the tenth grade, my English teacher, Mrs. Waites, *made* my class read *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. We were each assigned a part and had to perform the characters. As she handed out our roles—I played Hermia—we started to complain: “Why do we have to read a Shakespearean play? What does this have to do with me? Who cares about some play that was written four hundred years ago?” Mrs. Waites just smiled and continued to hand out our parts. At the time, I did not think much of these comments. In fact, I even joined in to some extent. However, though I did not find these remarks unusual or out of place, I did find the experience surprisingly meaningful and educational. While I assumed I would continue to “not care” about Shakespeare, I actually enjoyed the play and wanted to continue reading it. I found my place in the text as Mrs. Waites encouraged us to perform and examine *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and I wanted to find out more about Shakespeare's time period and comedic adventures. This moment still guides my own teaching, and, even today, I call my friend Tami by her stage name “Puck.”

My tenth grade experience is significant for several reasons: it exemplifies how students usually approach Early Modern dramas and particularly Shakespeare, and it provides an example of how presenting dramas from the collaborative perspective the playwright imagines enhances our students' experiences with these texts. The class' initial negative reaction to having to read a Shakespearean play is not an isolated incident. In fact, years later, when I became an English teacher, the same scenario

occurred to me in my own classroom. Since I had grown to love drama after my encounter with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I decided to incorporate a Shakespearean play into my Approaches to Literature course, a class I entitled "The Battle of the Sexes." As I handed out the syllabus, my students skimmed over works from Chaucer, Donne, and Austen, but they paused on *The Taming of the Shrew*. "Why do we have to read that?" they groaned. "What does that have to do with me?" These comments not only caught my attention because I had heard them before, but also because the class did not express the same complaint over Chaucer or Austen. In fact, the only objection to Austen came from a few boys who did not want to read a "chick" book. Nevertheless, when they realized that Kyra Knightley was starring in a new *Pride and Prejudice* movie, they quickly quieted. My own experience and my time in Mrs. Waites' classroom characterizes our students' approach to Renaissance drama; they feel disconnected, uninvited, and separate—the exact opposite mentality the Early Modern playwrights invoke.

The differences between our cultural and critical obsession with Early Modern drama and our students' feelings of discontinuity involves a paradox. Why are these plays so popular if students have a difficult time approaching them in the classroom? Why do Shakespeare movies succeed so well while many students feel these plays have nothing to do with them? Perhaps the answer lies in how we, as teachers, often examine these texts in our classrooms. Though Shakespeare, Jonson, and Beaumont encourage and rely on audience participation, aligning them with Rosenblatt's theories in her *Literature as Exploration* and LeFevre's observations in *Invention is a Social Act*, we

often only focus on how scholars have discussed these works, passing this information along to our students, instead of talking about how our students come to these works, how they interact with these texts, and how we can encourage them to participate.

Teachers inadvertently portray these texts as complete and unwittingly insinuate that the audience brings nothing to the drama. With that said, I do not wish to advocate that only one or the other of these approaches will help our students feel connected with Early Modern dramas, and I, also, am not advocating that the latter is more important than the former. I do, however, want to encourage teachers to combine literary theories with the play's collaborative qualities and become more like Mrs. Waites, whose activity encouraged students to participate in the collaborative playwright/audience relationship. We can prompt students to approach texts, such as *Hamlet* or *Bartholomew Fair*, as co-creators, placing them in the participatory position the writers examined and invoked, while also showing them that these texts have "something to do with them."

On a practical level, we should start with students' reactions to drama. Since these texts are popular in modern culture, we can assume that our students have encountered these dramas or at least representations of Early Modern dramas before they enter the classroom, similar to the way in which Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton assume that their audience brings a particular image of a "roaring girl" with them to the play. Furthermore, as John Dewey in his *Experience and Education* points out: "Just as no man lives or dies to himself, so no experience lives and dies to itself. Wholly independent of desire or intent, every experience lives on in further experiences" (27). For Dewey, past experiences with a text influence the students' current reading of the

play, and the students' current investigation into the text and the environment the teacher creates for this new experience will affect how students relate to the text in the future. In other words, students carry their previous encounters with drama and with Early Modern plays, particularly Shakespeare, into the classroom, and they will take the experience they have in the classroom into their next course. Therefore, what students bring with them influences the experience they have with the text and should influence the way we teach the plays. As teachers, we should ask our students to describe their experiences with the text before we engage with the readings. This simple conversation gets the students' preconceptions about the work into the open early and allows students to embrace a relationship with the text, as Shakespeare, Beaumont, and Jonson envision, and permits the writer to help form and encourage their collaborative participation. If we emphasize that their experiences with the text matter, they will feel connected to the works.

Another activity comes from Ann Berthoff's chapter "A Curious Triangle and the Double-Entry Notebook; or, How Theory Can Help Us Teach" in her *The Making of Meaning*. In this chapter, Berthoff discusses the intersection between criticism, reading, and writing: "The essential significance of criticism in the classroom is that it enables us to teach reading for meaning and writing as a way of making meaning" (42). She advocates criticism, critiques from students or from the teacher, "as the point where theory and practice meet: Criticism is knowing what you're doing and thereby how to do it. Criticism is method; it is practicing what you preach" (41). After creating a "curious triangle" as a replacement for the rhetorical triangle, Berthoff provides a practical approach to how to engage students with the text and how to emphasize how their

participation matters. Berthoff's double-entry journal is a notebook where students write down their observations on one side of the page and their evaluations of those notes on the other side of the page:

What makes this notebook different from most, perhaps, is the notion of the double entry: one the right side reading notes, direct quotations, observational notes, fragments, lists, images—verbal and visual—are recorded; on the other (facing) side, notes about those notes, summaries formulations, aphorisms, editorial suggestions, revisions, comment on comment are written. The reason for the double-entry format is that it provides a way for the student to conduct that “continuing audit of meaning” that is at the heart of learning to read and write critically. The facing pages are in dialogue with one another. (45)

Below is an example of a possible double-entry response to Act One of *Macbeth*. The right side includes notes from the text and reactions to the text. The comments on the left are “notes about those notes” (45).

	Macbeth Act I, Scene I
Witches and Lady Macbeth have a common bond here; they both first appear in the middle of something that feels unnatural. Lady Macbeth is rushed and the witches appear during a chaotic storm.	The witches enter in a natural event; however, does all the thunder and lightning mark an unnatural phenomenon that is about to occur? Also, they seem to only meet in “thunder, lightning, or in rain” (1.1.2).
Play focuses on senses: smell	“Fair is foul, and foul is fair,/ Hover through the fog and filthy air”—leaves a lingering sense that something isn’t quite right (1.1.10-11). I can almost smell the stench. Repeated words create the chant.
	Act I, Scene V
Does the play focus on words or actions? Saw this theme earlier in <i>Much Ado About</i>	Interesting that Lady Macbeth hears about the witches in a letter from Macbeth rather than in person. Like Macbeth, Lady Macbeth focuses on the titles: “Glamis,”

<p><i>Nothing</i>. Also, could the focus on titles here go along with Lady Macbeth's belief that men can read Macbeth like a book? Book title?</p> <p>What will Lady Macbeth's role be in the rest of the play? She seems to dominate here.</p>	<p>"Cawdor," and "King." Scene seems rushed; Lady Macbeth is not given much time to prepare for the arrival of her husband and Duncan.</p> <p>Immediately makes the arrival sound like a battle. (1.5.36-38). Has an Edgar Allen Poe moment: "The raven himself is hoarse."</p> <p>Repeated dark images and focus on smell again: "smoke of hell" (1.5.49). I assume Hell's smoke would smell very bad.</p> <p>Lady Macbeth has the idea to kill Duncan. Tells Macbeth that men can read his face.</p>
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This activity allows students to see that what they bring to the text matters. Engaging with the text in this capacity encourages students to discover their way into the text and emphasizes the playwright's desire for them to participate. From the double-entry notebook, students see how texts, and particularly here Early Modern dramas, have "something to do with them."

My final two suggestions stem from personal experiences in the classroom. In order to emphasize the active role students play with these texts, the collaborative position playwrights address and invoke for their audiences, I ask my students to form acting troupes. My introduction to Shakespeare course broke into mini "venture tripartites" and produced their own acts from *Othello* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As a class, we examined the texts, and as acting troupes, they re-examined the texts, bringing their reactions to the plays and becoming the audience (both the actors on the

stage and the theatergoers) while also working as the writers and the directors of the scenes; some groups chose to re-write the acts line by line. Throughout this project we discussed the rhetorical triangle, audience participation, current productions of the texts, and the original audiences. After the performances, the “theatergoers” critiqued the productions, and the “troupes” examined their own presentations, allowing the students to re-evaluate individually the relationship between the stage and the audience. Overall, this experience encouraged my students to see, once again, that they have “something to do with and in these texts”; they are collaborators.

The last activity returns to Early Modern composition and education practices: the Common-Place Book. Writers often gathered their thoughts, favorite quotations, and responses in a notebook, similar to the discussions in and arrangement of Jonson’s *Timber, or Discoveries*. I have tried an altered version of this particular activity; however, I am eager to have students follow a more traditional format. For a writing assignment, my students record and examine quotations of their choosing from the plays we are reading. After collecting these entries for several works, students compose an essay on a particular theme they see in their collections. While I allow my students to pick quotations that are interesting to them, I could have had them focus on themes such as metatheatrical moments or places where the writers discuss the audience, composition, or authority. Regardless of which approach is used, Common-Place Books allow students to find their own way into the text and encourage them to participate with the text as co-creators in the reading experience.

Since Early Modern playwrights took a collaborative approach to their audience, as teachers we should embrace these practices in the classroom and reiterate our own and our students' part in the production. Doing so will help students feel connected to these invitational texts. Furthermore, as students continue to read these texts and experience them in society, Early Modern playwrights will expand their audience, inviting new generations into their ideal collaborative union and enhancing our understanding of these texts and the stage.

¹ Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo+ Juliet*, Billy Morrisette's *Scotland, PA*, and Tim Blake Nelson's "*O*" could also be included in this list.

² See page 144 for a picture of the production, and see pages 191-204 for Elizabeth Schafer's examination of the performance (191-204).

³ UNCG's own Robert Beshere starred as the Citizen in this production.

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